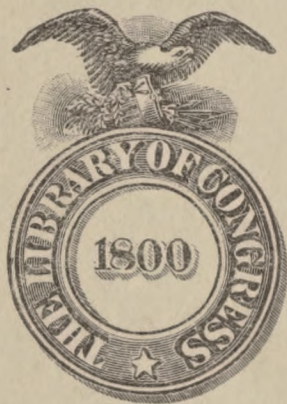




Christmas Tree House

Mary F. Leonard



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“SUSAN AND I ARE GOING TO WRITE A BOOK
AND PUT YOU IN IT.”

CHRISTMAS TREE HOUSE

BY

MARY F. LEONARD

AUTHOR OF "EVERYDAY SUSAN"

ILLUSTRATED

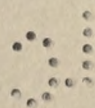


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CHRISTMAS TREE HOUSE

CHAPTER I

SOME SCRAPS OF PAPER

THEY sat on the stile, side by side, but facing different ways, Susan looking down the lane, Holliday across the road and the meadow to the little bird-cage station and Reservoir Hill beyond. They sat in the same position, elbows on knees, chin in hands, and the great sycamore that spread its branches above them showered them both impartially with crumpled brown leaves.

The maples and beeches showed a touch of color here and there, just enough to remind you it was October. In the fence corners the goldenrod was turning brown, but the breeze was soft and summer-like. All about, where two years ago there had been only fields, dwellings had sprung up. Some of these were yet unfinished, and the pleasant sound of carpenter's work was in the air. Thanks to the

enterprise of Colonel Brand, Reservoir Park was a growing suburb.

The girls had been to Mammy Ria's to take her a piece of Miss Margaret's wedding cake, and returning had missed their car by two or three minutes. Laughing and out of breath after their race down the lane, they had stopped to rest on top of the stile, while in the distance their car tinkled away. In silence they sat there, and the carpenters and a grazing cow with a bell attached to it had it all their own way for as much as five minutes. Then Holliday spoke.

"What are you thinking about, Susan?" she asked, without moving.

"Probably just what you are,—Miss Margaret, and that we shall not see her for a whole year."

"And although she is our Miss Margaret still, she is also Mrs. William Sidney Brand, which makes a difference," Holliday added.

"We look before and after,
And sigh for what is not."

That is the verse for to-day on my calendar, and I feel the truth of it. We can't help be-

ing sad over so many changes, can we? Besides Miss Margaret, there's your brother Joe in Colorado, and Miss Julia Anderson in Chicago, and dear little Elsie Seymour in Heaven."

"And Mr. Self and the parrot," Susan continued.

"Well, I don't care so much about them. I am sure Mr. Self is better off, and old Look-in-a-book, too."

"Maybe they are all better off," suggested Susan. "Joe is doing splendidly, and Miss Julia's husband is very rich, the Brocade Lady says. After all, Holliday, we ought to think of the blessings we have left instead of dwelling upon what we have lost."

Holliday's laugh rippled out. "What beautiful resignation, Susan! You deserve a reward, so I'll tell you a piece of news. Dick Seymour is going to be at home this winter. His mother is not well and wants him."

"Oh, is he?" Susan said coolly, but Holliday could see the cheek next her growing pinker. It was still easy to tease Susan.

"Tom Mann told me. He is to have a tutor so that he can enter college next year,"

Holliday continued. Then, going back to the subject uppermost in their thoughts, "Susan, what did Miss Margaret say to you?"

"When do you mean? Specially to me? Why—I don't know."

"I'll write to her that you have forgotten everything she said. Nonsense, Susan! I know what she said to me."

"What?"

"I shan't tell unless you will."

"Well, go on."

"She said she hoped we should not forget the Wise Man, this winter," Holliday began.

Susan nodded. "Yes, of course; she said that to me."

"You know how lovely and soft her voice can be, Susan? Well, she went on to say that it was harder for me than for you."

"I don't see why. You can see him every Sunday, now they have put his tablet in the church wall."

"Because, Susan, you are more of a natural digger than I, besides being cleverer."

"Miss Margaret didn't say that, I know." Susan insisted.

“Well, then, I say it. And she took my face between her hands and looked straight into my eyes, and said she knew I cared a great deal for fun, that I was bright and charming,—I wouldn’t tell this to anybody but you, Susan,—and that I was in danger of being spoiled. She said I could have admiration with very little effort; then she asked very solemnly if I was going to be content to be just a butterfly. For a minute I felt solemn and embarrassed, and then before I knew it I was laughing and saying that if I must be any sort of insect I’d try to be a busy bee. I don’t know what possesses me, Susan, but when people are very grave I always feel like laughing.”

Susan smiled, for this was so like Holliday. “Go on,” she said. “What else?”

“She didn’t laugh at all,” continued Holliday, “but looked hurt, which I couldn’t stand, of course; so I hugged her and said I’d be a mole and dig through to China, to please her. She laughed a little then, and said she only wished me to be myself,—my best self. It made me wonder how many I have.”

“I have three,” said Susan, “best, second

best, and worst; but you have ever so many, Holliday.

“Do you think so?” Holliday gazed dreamily at the dusty road. “It was rather nice to have her say I was charming.”

How could any one help saying it? Susan wondered. Holliday was growing tall, but there seemed to be no awkward age for her. The plain blue sailor suit, with its linen collar and cuffs, that she wore to-day seemed the one style of dress to emphasize her beauty; yet it was so with everything she put on.

“Well, Holliday, I’m sure you are,” she answered, at length, laying her hand on her friend’s arm.

Holliday took possession of the hand and pressed it against her cheek. “Thank you, Susan, though it did take you a good while to say it. For that matter, so are you.”

“Oh, no, I’m not. Some people like me, of course, and I suppose I have my good points, as Joe would say, but—”

“You have lovely eyes, Susan, and dark blue are far more unusual than brown, like mine. You are a darling sort of person, and when people don’t like you it is be-

cause you won't let them," Holliday concluded wisely.

Miss Margaret had said much the same thing to her. "You shut yourself into your shell, your Shyness, and just peep out at the world, and are a little cold and critical. Oh, I know all about the diffidence, but my Susan can overcome that if she will." To be cold and critical seemed worse than being a butterfly. Susan had a throb of envy at the thought that Miss Margaret liked Holliday best, but it quickly passed. She was too generous and true a friend to harbor such a thought for more than a minute.

"Susan," Holliday began, after another pause, "let's make a story out of the winter, for Miss Margaret. You know she asked us to keep a record of all we do and all that happens."

"I am sure there isn't anything left to happen. We shall probably spend the rest of our days in uneventful quiet."

"Uneventful quiet is good. As Miss Grant says, you express yourself remarkably well, Susan. Lend me your pencil for fear I forget it. It can go in the first chapter."

With Susan's little silver pencil Holliday scribbled "uneventful quiet" on her cuff. Susan protested, suggesting that it might not wash out.

"It probably will," Holliday answered carelessly. "You remember, Susan, that once before you said there was nothing left to happen. It may turn out just as it did then."

A little later, as they walked down the road to the station, she added in a burst of high spirits, "Susan, things *shall* happen this winter; we'll make them. To begin with, I am going to have a Hallowe'en party. Papa says I may. I hope Dick will get here in time for it."

"He said he would be here the last of the month. I had a letter from him," Susan said demurely.

"If you aren't the slickest puss! Why didn't you tell me?" Holliday laughed. "You must help me think what we shall do. It is to be a small party, because we can have more fun."

This opened such a field for discussion, that the two girls were scarcely conscious of anything else as they took their seats in the car.

Other passengers got on and off, but they paid no attention until at the city limits a tall, distinguished-looking man entered the car. At least Holliday thought him distinguished-looking. They might not have noticed him, but for her chatelaine bag which she was carelessly swinging to and fro as she talked, and which slipped from her fingers and fell at his feet.

He stooped for it and presented it with a very elaborate courtesy, that caused the color to surge into Susan's cheeks, for she was somehow sure he thought Holliday had dropped it purposely.

Holliday thanked him, smiling in her girlish, friendly way, quite unconscious, and the stranger sat down several seats in front of them, glancing back once or twice. Susan tried not to look at him, but as he was directly in front of her it was hard not to do so. However, he presently took a letter from his breast pocket, glanced over it, and then began to tear it up and toss the pieces out of the open car window. By a curious chance some of these scraps, caught by the wind and blown back into Susan's window, fell in her lap.

Holliday was telling her about a party one of her cousins in New Orleans had given, and while she listened, Susan idly fitted these scraps together like a dissected puzzle. Before she thought what she was doing she had a sentence: "It will be worth while if it takes a year. Yours, B. A." In the meantime the stranger had left the car.

"Susan! how funny!" Holliday exclaimed.

"I suppose I ought not to have done it," said Susan, apologetically.

"I shouldn't mind. It was his own fault, and it can't do any harm. But what do you imagine is worth while? I can't help wondering. Don't you think he has an interesting face?"

Susan did not agree with her, and said so, even going so far as to insist he was like Monsieur Rigaud in "Little Dorrit," with his waxed mustache, and that Holliday need not have smiled so when she thanked him.

"As if a person could tell how much she was smiling," Holliday cried indignantly. "You are worse than Aunt Nan, Susan."

Susan was about to toss the scraps out of the window again when Holliday rescued them

and dropped them into her bag. "Just for fun I'm going to keep them. This may be the beginning of an adventure, for all we know," she said.

They got off at Browinski's corner, Holliday having decided she could not live through the evening without some sweet chocolate, and after she had made her purchase they walked along North Street, past Christmas Tree House. It looked dignified and haughty, all bolted and barred as it was, quite as if, Susan said, it had made up its mind not to be in the story.

Holliday glanced up regretfully at the lofty pillars. "What good times we would have there this winter if Miss Margaret were at home! Miss Reynor says there are lots of interesting old things stored away that Mrs. Carrol allowed to go with the house when she sold it to Colonel Brand. Things he has never looked at."

"I heard the Brocade Lady talking to Mother about Mrs. Carrol's will," said Susan. "You know she left some money to her old servants and some of her friends, some lace and silver to Aline Arthur, and everything else

for a children's ward in the new hospital; but she said it was doubtful if there would be more than enough to endow a bed."

As they were separating at the corner, Holliday exclaimed, "Susan Maxwell, you didn't tell me one word that Miss Margaret said to you!"

Susan laughed. "You didn't give me a chance," she answered.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY

MRS. BOONE said it took a death or a wedding to show you how many friends you had. Certainly Miss Kennedy was surprised and touched at the many evidences of regard and affection that came to her at the time of her marriage. Her sweetness and charm, as well as the courageous way in which she had met her troubles, had gained her the admiration of many people who, until then, had found no way of expressing it, and flowers and gifts descended upon her in something like an avalanche.

If Colonel Brand had not been so happy, he might have become sensitive at being so often told that he was a lucky man. The Brocade Lady stoutly maintained that Margaret was just as lucky as he. To be sure, he was twenty years her senior, but in some respects he was young for his years, and she prophesied he would grow younger.

The improvements at St. Mark's, which had done away with that queer basement room where Miss Margaret held her little school for two winters, were completed just in time for the wedding,—a very quiet one with only her intimate friends present, and her adoring pupils, as bridesmaids, grouped about her. After the ceremony a reception was given by Mrs. Boone, who as an old friend of Margaret's parents begged for the privilege. The Seymours, Margaret's only relatives, were abroad, detained in Paris by the illness of Mrs. Seymour; the Brocade Lady's cottage was not large and her son a nervous invalid; so Mrs. Boone gayly declared herself next in succession.

She loved to entertain; to feed people was her greatest delight, and Dr. Mann used to say that to her, seconded by Browinski, he owed a good deal of his practice. On this occasion they both outdid themselves, and the beauty of the bride's table has never been forgotten by those who saw it.

Miss Margaret, in white satin and lovely old lace which had belonged to her grandmother, was enveloped in a new and myste-

rious charm which made one feel a little in awe of her, Susan thought, watching her in a sort of dream and forgetting her own supper. Indeed, the four girls had basked in romance to such an extent that it seemed almost hopeless to bring them down to everyday life and lessons again.

Although Miss Margaret and the Colonel had disappeared under a shower of rice on Wednesday evening, and this was Saturday morning, Susan as she dusted the dining-room was going over again every detail of the wedding, and was doing a number of absent-minded things in consequence. When she came to the bookcase, it struck her that her shelf needed rearranging, and when she opened the doors a little blue Longfellow tumbled out. It had been displaced yesterday in a hurried search for something else; now it lay meekly at her feet as if to remind her that once it had been a favorite, only to be crowded out of her affection by the "Library of Poetry and Song" and "Lucile."

"Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build,"

she read as she picked it up. It had fallen

open at "The Builders," which had served Holliday a good turn in her composition about the Wise Man's grave, the first winter at school.

"It suits our story exactly," Susan said to herself; "Our to-days and yesterdays are what we are to write about. We might change it to: 'For the story that we tell, time is with materials filled.' " She was dreaming over this, her elbows on the desk-top, her duster lying idle, when the door opened to admit Holliday.

"Well, Susan Hermione, what are you thinking about?" she demanded, dropping down in the big leather chair, from which she displaced Wynkyns.

Susan waked up and began explaining and dusting at the same time.

Holliday interrupted her in the midst of it. "Now, Susan Maxwell, don't go and point any moral about keeping our days beautiful,— 'Be good, dear child,' and all that, for you know that stories are perfectly stupid with everybody good and no villains!"

She sat on the edge of the chair and spoke with such vehemence, that Wynk, who had jumped into her lap, stretched his neck and

licked her cheek with a rough red tongue. Holliday pushed him from her with an exclamation of disgust.

Susan laughed. "You need not glare at me like an accusing angel when it's all your own idea. I hadn't thought of a moral."

"You would have come around to it in a minute," her friend insisted, rubbing her cheek, "for you do love morals, Susan."

"Well, it is rather a nice idea when you think of it," she answered, shaking her duster out of the open window. "I don't mean making our days beautiful, since you object, but thinking of them as blocks to build our story out of."

"It seems to me you are mixing things. You don't build stories with blocks, you write them on pages. 'Our to-days are the pages—'"

At this moment a man came in at the side gate, and, seeing Susan, handed her a package through the window. It was a square, heavy package, addressed to Miss Susan Maxwell.

"What can it be?" she wondered, laying it on Holliday's knees.

"It's heavy and feels like a box," said Holliday.

While they were lifting and feeling and wondering, Mrs. Maxwell came in and suggested that it might be as well to open it and settle the question.

"You see, it may be only something stupid, and it is such fun to guess, Mrs. Maxwell," Holliday explained.

The interest of guessing failed after a little, and curiosity won the day. Susan clipped the stout cord and removed the wrappings, and lo! there appeared a ream of white paper in large sheets such as are used in a typewriter.

For a moment they gazed at each other blankly; then Holliday cried, clapping her hands, "Our to-days and yesterdays, Susan! Don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Susan, as the box slipped from Holliday's lap, sending the loose sheets of paper far and wide.

"Now, isn't that like me! Go on with your work, and I will pick them up. Of course Miss Margaret ordered it, to remind us of our story." Holliday sat on the floor and began gathering in all the sheets that were within her reach.

"What in the world is Holliday doing?"

asked Charlie Willard, looking in at the open window.

"I should think you might see," that young lady retorted.

"Pardon me, Miss Heywood. I should have asked what you are going to do with that paper after you have picked it up." Charlie swung himself in. "Here's a pattern Mother borrowed," he said to Susan, and then began to fish out the leaves from under the table.

"Thank you, Charlie. Susan and I are going to write a book and put you in it."

"Me?—I?" cried Charlie.

Susan frowned. Holliday would go and tell things, always.

"Am I to be the hero?" Charlie asked modestly.

Holliday gazed at him thoughtfully, the tip of her tongue touching her upper lip. "Who will be our hero, do you suppose, Susan?"

Susan hadn't thought about it. "I don't believe it will be Charlie," she added, laughing.

"Oh, of course I have no chance now Dick is coming home," Charlie declared, pretending to be downcast.

"We shall need a villain to make it interesting, Susan," Holliday suggested.

"When I am helping you, too! I call that shabby," said Charlie, pretending to be very downcast.

"What is shabby?" inquired Lily Boone, standing in the door. "How are you, Susan? Charlie, your mother said to tell you to meet her at Carr's at eleven." Lily seated herself on the sofa and looked at Holliday. "What are you going to do with all that paper?" she wished to know.

"Write a book and put you in it."

"Oh, not really, Holliday,—you aren't," Lily exclaimed, appearing rather pleased, however, as she settled herself with numberless pats and smoothings, and regarded Holliday with wide-open eyes.

Holliday gazed back at her critically. "She'd make a good illustration, Susan."

"A real Christmas-tree ornament, isn't she?" said Charlie, who loved to tease his pretty cousin.

"I'm not at all, Charlie Willard," Lily cried in injured tones.

"Do you notice how often Lily Ann looks

at the ceiling?" he continued. "Well, she isn't looking for cobwebs, but she read somewhere that eyes turned heavenward are always beautiful."

Holliday threw the box lid at him. "Do behave yourself, Charlie. I wouldn't mind him, Lily," she added, for the blue eyes showed signs of tears. "Here comes Bessie. Hear her ask the same question."

Naturally, as Holliday still sat on the floor with the paper in her lap, Bessie's first words were a question in regard to it.

Holliday answered promptly, "Susan and I are going to write a story and put you in it."

"What do you mean? I don't want to be in a story." Bessie invariably met any plan with objections. She stood by the table, looking down at Holliday, her lips tightly closed.

"That is too bad," Holliday responded sweetly, "for the only way you can keep out of it is to leave town. Of course you can be a minor character, Bessie."

Charlie laughed, and Lily asked, "Why don't you want to? They are going to have illustrations."

"Lily Ann, my simple cousin, I hate to leave

you, but duty calls," exclaimed Charlie, rising. "Thanks again for that kind suggestion about the villain, Miss Heywood. I'll get even."

"It seems to me you fitted the cap to your own head," replied that young person, coolly.

When Charlie had gone, the girls fell to talking about their new teacher, Miss Grant. After much discussion it had been decided by their elders that the four girls should share during the coming winter the instructions of a visiting governess in their English studies, with lessons in French from Monsieur Laval. Miss Grant was as different from Miss Margaret as possible, being a large, capable, breezy person, with a plain, kindly face, whom it was impossible to dislike but about whom, as Holliday expressed it, you could never be wild.

The class met at the Heywoods', but in the excitement and interest of the wedding had not settled down to real work as yet. Miss Grant had been lenient, but warned them she expected them to begin in earnest on Monday.

"It is going to be different this winter," said Bessie, with a sigh. "You had to study for Miss Margaret because you couldn't bear to disappoint her."

"The Brocade Lady says it will be just as well for us to learn to do right because it is right and not just to please Miss Margaret," added Susan.

"Mr. Bright said that love was the highest motive in the world, and I rather think he knows as much as the Brocade Lady," Holliday insisted.

"Well," remarked Lily, rather acutely for her, "we can still go on doing things for Miss Margaret. I am sure she wants us to."

"It will be a reflection on her if we don't do well, I suppose," Holliday assented.

Bessie and Lily left presently, and Susan and Holliday settled themselves to study their history lesson; but in the middle of the first page, Holliday remembered a letter from Clarice Dumont which the postman had handed to her at the gate.

"It is an awfully interesting letter, Susan, and I only half read it; and now I have thought of it I shall not be able to do my history till I get it off my mind."

Holliday's fondness for Clarice was one of the things Susan couldn't understand. To her Clarice seemed rather silly. She was seventeen

and regarded herself as a grown young lady. Her manners were patronizing, and her conversation almost exclusively concerned her love affairs. Susan did not wish to appear unsympathetic, however, so she put down her book and asked what the letter was about.

“I won’t read the first of it, but there is something she says about a man. Let me see—here it is.”

In her search for what she wished to read, the first page of the letter slipped from her fingers. Susan, stooping to get it, saw that it began “Holliday darling,” and resented it. Did Holliday call Clarice “darling”? she wondered.

“You know,” explained Holliday, “she has been at Warm Springs with her aunt for a month. That is where she met him. She says: ‘—I feel I have met my fate. All my other affairs seem childish in the light of this. He is much older than I, but divinely handsome. His manners are perfect, he talks brilliantly.’ ”

“I shouldn’t think he’d care for Clarice. She isn’t brilliant,” Susan couldn’t resist saying.

Holliday looked at her severely. “I think

her letters are very interesting," she said firmly, "but I won't read you any more."

Susan insisted that she didn't mind hearing it, but Holliday folded her letter and put it in her history book. "I don't feel like studying," she said. "I think I'll go home;" and she went off presently, leaving Susan uncomfortable.

"I don't care, I do think Clarice is silly," she said to herself. Yet she was conscious of a desire to hear the rest of it.

Nearly an hour later, just as she was closing her book, two hands were clapped over her eyes from behind. It was Holliday who had stolen in unperceived.

"What a good, good girl you are!" she exclaimed. "I have been upstairs all this time talking to your mother."

"Why, Holliday Heywood," cried Susan, "I thought you were cross and went home. You always do the thing I don't expect."

"I do things I don't expect to do myself," said Holliday, "but I didn't like your talking as if Clarice were feeble-minded."

Susan hastened to disclaim any such extreme opinion as this, but Holliday wouldn't listen.

“I suppose Clarice *is* a goose. I read her letter to your mother.”

Susan stared in amazement. Read such stuff to Mother!

“She said it did not sound like the real thing, though no doubt Clarice thought she was in love. She said,—oh, I don’t know,—she said a lot, but your mother is sympathetic, Susan. She said now was the time for comradeship, and the better friends we were now, the better lovers we would make when the time came.”

CHAPTER III

MISS REYNOR TAKES A BOARDER

THE Reynors lived on North Street, next to Christmas Tree House. There were in the family only Miss Cornelia and her brother Reginald, known to Susan as the Poet, and for two persons they had a good deal more room than they needed. If there had been enough money to keep it up in the style so dear to Miss Cornelia's heart, this would not have mattered. "It is my ambition," she said, "to have everything as it was in dear mother's lifetime." This meant fresh paint every three or four years, besides the other repairs constantly demanded by an old house. It meant also at least two maids, and a man to keep the brass bright, the windows polished, and the outside stones whitened, not to mention the garden.

The effort to live as dear mother did was beginning to tell on Miss Cornelia; little fine lines were showing on her forehead and around her eyes. She was naturally a plump, rosy person, with curling hair and a chuckling

laugh, quite the opposite of the Poet, who was very tall and abnormally thin.

Their once comfortable income had shrunk alarmingly of late, and now it was no longer supplemented by the board of their old aunt, Miss Polly Reynor, who had made her home with them for years, and then at her death left everything she had to charity.

Miss Cornelia bravely contended that a person had a right to do as she pleased with her own, but it was a blow, nevertheless. She couldn't bear to trouble Reggie. She was aware of the general opinion that she spoiled her brother; but if true, there was excuse for it. A severe illness in early childhood had all but wrecked his nervous system and kept him an invalid for years. When other boys were developing courage and initiative in all sorts of rough-and-tumble games, Reginald was of necessity carefully guarded from all excitement and overexertion. As he grew older his health was slowly regained, so that he was able to go through college; but he seemed quite unfitted for an active business or professional life, and after several attempts he had given up and retired to his library to study and write.

Miss Cornelia, who was ten years older and not gifted in any way, was extremely proud of her brother's verses, which had found a place in some of the best magazines. She failed at times to make head or tail of them, but admired them none the less.

Miss Cornelia often referred to herself as not at all clever, meaning that she did not care for books; but when it came to domestic affairs, not Mrs. Boone herself was better authority. So it happened that the Brocade Lady stopped in one morning on her way from market to consult her about the chilli sauce she was going to make. They sat on the side porch, Miss Cornelia in her blue percale and white-ruffled apron, the Brocade Lady in ample skirts and shady bonnet; and after the question of spices had been settled the talk drifted to other matters, chiefly concerning the neighborhood.

"The last time I saw you, you were thinking of giving Mattie up," the Brocade Lady remarked, "and it occurred to me afterward that the Seymours would probably be glad to get her."

"I did think of it," Miss Reynor replied hesitatingly, "but I have made other plans.

I fear it will seem very rash to you, but—well, I am going to take a boarder.”

“You might do worse,” the Brocade Lady told her. “I only hope your experiment will turn out as well as mine.”

“Oh—Margaret Kennedy! That was different. Still, I really believe it was providential. The only trouble is I don’t know what Reggie will think. He is away this week.”

“I shouldn’t worry too much about that. Reggie’s thoughts thus far haven’t been very remunerative,” the Brocade Lady remarked coolly.

Miss Cornelia flushed a little. “Really good poetry doesn’t pay very well,” she said, “but dear Mother always felt that Reginald would do something with his talents some day.”

“I shan’t dispute that; but tell me about your boarder.”

“It really was odd the way it happened,” said Miss Reynor. “I was just on the point of telling Mattie to look out for another home, when she brought me a card: ‘Mr. Edmund Clarence Lemoyne.’ He wished to see me on business, she said, and I thought it must be

something about taxes. You know how they are always turning up to annoy you. Then I saw 'Mobile,' in the corner of his card, and decided he was a book agent, most likely. However, I went down, and really I never in my life met a more courteous and elegant gentleman. He was most apologetic. He felt that he was in a way intruding, he said, but he had a note from Mrs. Thomas to support him. He went on to say he was a stranger in town, but expected to spend most of the winter here, and as he disliked hotel life was anxious to find some private family where there were no other boarders, where he could spend three months or so. He had a letter to the Thomases from some relative of theirs in Mobile, and when he spoke of wanting a boarding-place Annie Thomas thought of me. She said in her note she hoped I would not think her presuming, and I don't, although I was surprised."

"And you agreed to take him?" asked the Brocade Lady.

"Well, you see from the very start it seemed to me providential. I had to do something, and he was willing to pay well. His board will more than pay the servants, and I shall

have to spend very little extra on the table. Then, as I say, his manners were so charming, and he was so delighted with the house,—so appreciative,—that I couldn't resist. He preferred this part of town, too. He was going up to Cincinnati for a week and wanted the matter settled before he left. I think he said he was engaged in literary work,—something about Southern Homes. I trust he and Reggie will be congenial. Do you think me very rash?" Miss Cornelia ended anxiously.

"In the light of what you say it does not seem so. A gentleman, a friend of the Thomases, engaged in literary work,—all sounds well. It will be good for both of you to have some one in the house, besides."

Miss Cornelia herself felt this. She was eminently sociable, while her brother often sat through a meal without uttering a word. It would be good for Reggie and most agreeable to her to have a pleasant, talkative person such as Mr. Lemoyne presumably was, at the table. Her hospitable soul warmed to the task of making her guest, as she preferred to call him, comfortable. She would give him the blue room, which was particularly pleasant in win-

ter, with its sunny outlook upon the garden of Christmas Tree House.

With her brother's return, unhappily, a change came over the spirit of her dreams. She had feared some opposition, but, as she told the Brocade Lady later, Reggie was positively hostile to Mr. Lemoyne. He had met the gentleman at the Club, where he was introduced by Dr. Thomas, and had found him thoroughly objectionable.

"I am surprised that you should have been imposed upon by such blarney, Cornelia. If I am any judge of human nature that man is a cad," he declared.

At this Miss Reynor's tears overflowed. "I felt I had to do something," she murmured.

"Very well, I'll say no more. I realize that being such a dismal failure, I am not in a position to assert myself. However, Mr. Fairbanks has given me a job on his paper," the Poet smiled faintly at the word he used, "so I shall not be wholly a burden, if I make good, though the remuneration is not large."

Miss Cornelia's tears fell faster. "Oh, Reggie, don't talk like that. You aren't a failure or a burden. What we have is as much

yours as mine. It is only that real poetry doesn't pay. If you wish, I'll write to Annie Thomas that we can't take Mr. Lemoyne, and get her to explain."

"As you have committed yourself, I suppose we must make the best of it for the winter," said Reginald, relenting. "But another time I'll be obliged to you, Cornelia, if you will consult me before taking any such step." Never had the Poet been known thus to assert himself. His sister's eyes followed him in astonishment, as he left the room.

It quickly got abroad that Miss Reynor's boarder was a friend of the Thomases, and it was so easy and natural a thing to believe, that no one questioned it. Even Mrs. Thomas herself, after one or two attempts at explanation, let it go without contradiction. The truth was she had never seen or heard of Mr. Lemoyne before the day when the Doctor brought him home to dinner. The letter he presented was from a friend from whom she had not heard for years, and who was at present abroad. It represented Mr. Lemoyne as engaged in literary pursuits, and particularly interested in Southern architecture, and asked

that they would further his work in any way possible.

Whatever Miss Cornelia may have meant by its being providential, it is certain that the sudden advent of this objectionable stranger into his home acted as a spur to the not over-energetic Poet. When he accepted Mr. Bright's offer of the church organ during the absence of the regular organist, it was rather as a pleasure and recreation; but this was not all.

"I understand Mr. Seymour is looking around for a tutor for his son," the rector said one day. "Why don't you apply, Reynor?"

The Poet shrank. "I haven't any gift for teaching," he answered.

"How do you know you haven't? Anyhow, coaching a boy like Dick is not like teaching school. You could do it, and it would pay you."

The Poet saw his beloved leisure slipping away from him, and himself degenerating into a Jack-of-all-trades. He sighed, but a day or two later, meeting Mr. Bright, he said, "If you think you can conscientiously recommend me, Bright, would you mind sounding Mr. Seymour?"

CHAPTER IV

CHIEFLY LETTERS

DARLING MISS MARGARET,—

I little guessed what I should have to tell you in my steamer letter. Susan said the other day when we were talking about all that had happened, that she guessed we were destined to spend the rest of our days in uneventful quiet. Neither of us dreamed what a mockery the words would seem, for last Thursday night our house burned down. Not down, exactly, but most of the inside. I am still so excited when I think of it, my hand is trembly. I am writing at the desk in the Maxwells' dining-room with Susan's pen, and I have on some of Lily's clothes. But, as they say in stories, this is anticipating. I'll go back to Wednesday, which seems more like a year ago. We were getting ready for Aunt Nan, who, you know, needs a great deal of room. I had stayed in the guest chamber while mine was being papered, and some of my summer things were there; so

Gertie thought she would pack them away in the third-story press. It is a dark place, or rather was, and she had a candle. We think she must have left it, though she says she didn't, for the fire began near the roof, and may have smoldered for hours.

While she was busy upstairs, I put all my drawers and shelves in most beautiful order. I slaved for hours, Miss Margaret, and when I was through they looked like Susan's. I was so proud I kept going back and opening the armoire and the bureau to feast my eyes. I thought how if I were to die that night people would admire my orderliness, and perhaps mention it on my tombstone. As it turned out, I shall never get any credit for it. Susan says hereafter I will always say, "What's the use? The house may burn down," when I am reproached for my disorder.

I was so tired I went to bed early, and it seemed about a minute afterwards, when I heard Papa calling me. It was really about two o'clock in the morning. He was standing by my bed and said very quietly and sternly, "Holliday, get up at once and dress. The house is on fire." Then he went to call the

servants, and said he would come back for me and that I must make haste and not be frightened. I really think if he had not been so calm it would have been better. I was not frightened, I only thought what Susan and I had decided to do in case of fire. We once heard Colonel Brand say that people rarely ever save the things they value most, so we wrote down what we would do. In the first place I had determined to save my jewel case, with Mamma's miniature and my ruby ring, and the fan Uncle Lawrie brought from India. So I put on my slippers and ran to the bureau and pulled out the drawer where I have kept them for years, and they weren't there!

I was frantic then. I couldn't imagine what had become of them, and tossed everything this way and that, searching for them, when suddenly I remembered that in my cleaning up I had decided to keep my valuables in one of the drawers of the chiffonier. There they were, after I had found the key which I had put between the leaves of my prayer book, for safe keeping. Well, I crammed them and everything else in sight into the bag I had had out at

Lily's, which Gertie had forgotten to put away. And then I began to hear shouting and the engines puffing, and I realized that the room was getting full of smoke.

I remembered then that Papa had said to get dressed and I thought of my long coat, but it wasn't in the armoire. Gertie had changed it to the press in the hall. When I opened the door into the hall the smoke was terrible, and I could see tiny flames creeping around the third-story stairs. That frightened me, and I ran back, and couldn't think what to do and probably I should have burned up if Papa had not come rushing back. He wrapped a blanket around me, picked me up, and put me out of the window of his room on to the veranda roof, and a fireman carried me down a ladder.

Mr. Reynor was there in the front yard and made me put on his overcoat, and wanted to take me to their house, and everybody in the neighborhood asked me; but I said, "Take me to Susan's." Fortunately Dr. Mann came by in his buggy, and he took Gertie and me in and brought us over here. Mr. Maxwell was at the gate on his way to the fire, and Mrs. Maxwell

came running down in her dressing-gown, when she heard our voices.

Susan was the most surprised person you ever saw. She heard the noise,—for Gertie did carry on dreadfully,—and came out into the hall just as I got to the head of the stairs. I suppose I must have looked funny in the Poet's overcoat with my hair tumbling down, and only bedroom slippers on my bare feet. I said, "Well, Miss Maxwell, how is this for uneventful quiet?"

Mrs. Maxwell made me drink some horrid beef tea, and Silvy kindled a fire and then took Gertie down to her room, and Susan and I sat in a big chair with a blanket around us and watched till the flames, which we could see very plainly, had died away. Papa came in looking like I don't know what, all black with smoke, and said the silver and a good many things on the first floor had been saved. By this time it was light, but we went to bed and Susan and I slept till nine o'clock.

Gertie brought our breakfast up to us, and while we were eating I suddenly remembered that all I had to put on, besides my robe de nuit and my slippers, was a pair of white



"I SUPPOSE I MUST HAVE LOOKED FUNNY IN THE
POET'S OVERCOAT."

gloves. I had held on to my bag, so my jewel case was safe, which I was glad of, and I had saved my best handkerchiefs, my church envelopes, and the gloves. I began to laugh and then to cry, for really it is dreadful to have nothing to wear. In the midst of my despair Lily came in like a ministering angel. Her grandmother had sent her with Columbus and two dress boxes full of things. I can't wear anything of Susan's, but Lily's clothes fit me almost perfectly. She has awfully pretty underclothes, and she had brought silk stockings. I said I didn't wear silk stockings every day, but she insisted on my taking them. Lily was perfectly charmed with herself, and kept thinking of things she could lend me, and finally she had a brilliant idea. Miss Flynn was making her a challis, which was almost done, and she said I could buy it and she would get another.

I was glad enough, and Mrs. Maxwell thought it was a good plan; so now I feel as if I had turned into Lily. It doesn't look like me. It is gray blue with white rings in it, trimmed with blue silk, but beggars can't be

choosers. Experience impresses the truth of such sayings upon you.

I suppose I shall never hear the last of my white gloves, for Lily in the innocence of her heart told Charlie that all I had saved were my slippers and gloves. And you know Charlie.

Anyhow, I had my gloves to wear to church. I thought I ought to go and give thanks that we weren't burned up ourselves, so I went in Lily's dress and Susan's hat. I looked over at the Wise Man's tablet and thought of you, and resolved to dig hard hereafter to show my thankfulness.

Papa is staying at the Clifford, and we are looking for a house. I can't bear to think it may be far away from this neighborhood. Susan has been perfectly dear to me. And now, Miss Margaret dear, I have written you a long letter, though I haven't told half. I hope you will have a delightful voyage. I miss you every day, even your scoldings which I always deserved.

With love to Colonel Brand,

Always your devoted,

HOLLIDAY.

MY DEAR MISS MARGARET,—

Holliday says we really ought to say “Dear Mrs. Brand,” but that would make it seem like a letter to some one I did not know, and Mother says you will be glad to be called Miss Margaret still. Holliday has told you about the fire. We have not talked of anything else since it happened, so I feel as if there was nothing left to tell you. Holliday has been very brave and cheerful, and makes jokes about not having any clothes of her own, but it must be very hard. It is lovely to have her here. We talked so much at night, Mother had to put her in Joe’s room. Isn’t it fortunate Holliday can wear Lily’s things, and that Lily has such a lot? I am afraid Mr. Heywood won’t be able to find a house in this part of town. They may have to stay at the hotel.

The Brocade Lady thought maybe Miss Reynor would take them, but Miss Cornelia said that three people and two maids would be more than she could accommodate. She has one boarder, a man who writes books, Lily says.

The fire interrupted our class, but we are to

begin again to-morrow, at Mrs. Boone's, for the present. Miss Grant is very pleasant, but not like you. Monsieur Laval is nice, too. I must tell you a funny thing Lily said. He gave us some sentences to translate, just to see how much we knew. Lily's was "*Chacun à son gout*," and she read it "Every one has the gout." Of course we laughed, and she said, just as if we were disputing it, "I don't care, almost everybody has."

Monsieur laughed and laughed, and said, "*C'est vrai, mademoiselle. Je l'ai moi-même*," but it was ever so long before he could convince her that *gout* means "taste" in English.

We are reading "Cinderella," and it is funny how exciting it is in French. Aunt Henrietta sent me a French Testament, and last night Holliday and I read about the Wise Man. I don't think "*l'homme prudent*" sounds half so well as "wise man." Father says we are naturally prejudiced in favor of English.

Holliday was going to have a Hallowe'en party, but now she doesn't know where she will be. Mother says we may have it here.

Silvy has just brought in Clarice's card. She is very stylish. It is only Holliday she wants to see, but I suppose I'll have to go in.

I hope you and Colonel Brand will have a lovely time. Please remember me to him, and don't forget me, dear Miss Margaret. I am going to remember all you said.

Your very loving,

SUSAN.

Holliday looked in at the door as Susan was sealing her letter. "Put a stamp on mine, please, Susan, and I'll remember to pay you back. I suppose you know Clarice is here."

"Do you think she wants to see me?"

"She wouldn't be very polite if she didn't," Holliday answered.

"I meant really," Susan explained, as she put on the stamps.

Clarice was not an intimate friend like Bessie and Lily, who ran in without formality, so she was received in the parlor. At this time living rooms had not come into vogue. People like the Seymours had drawing-rooms, but less fashionable folk were content with parlors. At Susan's there was a large mirror over the

mantel, with a bronze clock and ornaments in front of it. In the wall space on either side hung portraits of Grandfather and Grandmother Maxwell; between the front windows was one of Susan herself at the age of three, very chubby and blue-eyed and kissable. There was an elaborately embroidered lambrequin on the mantel, and a scarf to match on the pier table, and the furniture was in linen covers. It was not at all the homelike place the dining-room was. Susan was apt to feel shy and stiff when she had a visitor in the parlor.

Clarice rushed to Holliday and embraced her ardently. "To think of all you have gone through since I last saw you!" she exclaimed. "But you are not utterly crushed, as I feared."

Holliday laughed. "Of course I am not. Did you think something fell on me?"

Clarice laughed, too. "Silly child, but then you haven't any nerves. And how is Susan?" she added, turning to her.

Susan submitted to be kissed, with, "I am very well, thank you," feeling somehow an extremely small girl.

Although Clarice professed a deep interest

in the fire, it seemed to Susan she only half listened to Holliday. At the first opportunity she broke in with, "Oh, Holliday, I suppose you received my letter?" Her manner was significant, and Susan scented love affairs.

She looked at the ceiling and then at the floor. "My fondest hopes are to be realized," she cried. "I am dying to tell you."

"Shall I go upstairs?" Susan asked.

"How very blunt you are. Of course not. I should not care to have you speak of it, but I am sure I can trust you, Susan."

"She will keep it dark, won't you, Susan? Go on, Clarice," Holliday urged.

Again Clarice studied the hearth rug, with her head on one side. "He is to be here this winter,—the friend I wrote you about."

"Really, Clarice? What fun!"

"I had a note from him the day we left. I don't know what Mamma will say when she hears it. She has been so unkind. She treats me like a child, but she will find it is useless to oppose me."

It seemed that this friend whose name Clarice had not as yet mentioned, was much older than she. However, she declared im-

pressively she would rather be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. That there could be any other alternative did not apparently occur to her.

After all, a girl with a real lover was interesting, and Clarice in her pale blonde way was unusually pretty to-day. It was quite annoying to have the Brocade Lady walk in. Mrs. Maxwell was out, but all she wanted was Joe's address, for some friends who were going to Denver, and Susan could give her that. Instead of leaving when it was given her, she sat at her ease, chatting about things in general and asking Holliday questions about the fire, till Clarice could stand it no longer, and left.

"Susan," said Holliday, as she dropped their letters into the mail box at the corner, later that afternoon, "there is a queer thing I forgot to tell you. I am not perfectly certain, but I think I saw that Worth While Man the night of the fire. It was when Mr. Reynor was putting his coat on me. I forgot it till this morning, when I found the scraps of his letter in my jewel box where I had put them. They reminded me."

"It is funny they happened to be saved.

Perhaps some day we shall find out what is worth while, and who B. A. is," answered Susan.

"Perhaps. And, Susan, it is our secret, just yours and mine. We won't tell any one."

"I won't if you won't," Susan agreed.

CHAPTER V

A TELEGRAM [SUSAN WRITES]

EVERY rose, it is said, has a thorn, and so the pleasure of having Holliday with me was half spoiled by the fear that they would have to take a house far away in another part of town. I know, of course, we ought not to cross bridges before we come to them, but it is hard to live up to. Mr. Heywood heard of a house on Deane Avenue, that was for rent, furnished, for the winter, and as Holliday said, it sounded alarmingly nice. He sent word to her to be ready at three that afternoon to go with him to look at it.

It was Saturday, and she and Lily and I were sitting in my room with our work. Holliday was replenishing her wardrobe, she said, and was indignant at me for laughing at the very fancy apron she was making.

“It is easy for you to laugh when you have a whole drawer full. Suppose the Hospital

Guild should have a tea and want me to wait on a table?" she said.

I told her she might have one of mine in that case, but she insisted she was sick and tired of borrowing.

We were telling Lily about the house on Deane Avenue, and wondering what would become of our class if they took it, for it is more than a mile away, when Robin Bright came in with Foxy at his heels. Robin still wanders around the neighborhood, although his aunt, Mrs. Tryon, who has come to live with them and take care of him and his father, tries to keep him at home. He is very intimate with all the cooks and seems to know the days when cake making is going on.

"Here's a letter for you, Holliday," he said. He added, when we asked him where he got it, that Silvy gave it to him, and the boy was waiting.

"It is from Papa. Probably he can't get off to look at the house," Holliday said as she opened it. "And I'll just be glad of it," she went on. "I hope somebody else will take it, so we can't."

When she unfolded the note, a yellow paper

fell into her lap. She read the note aloud: "Dear Daughter, I enclose telegram just received. Let me know how the idea strikes you."

"It must be from Aunt Nan," she said; then for a minute we thought she had lost her mind. As she looked at the telegram her eyes grew bigger and bigger, and then she jumped up, letting her work fall on the floor, and began to dance wildly around the room, crying, "Susan! Lily! the grandest thing!"

Foxy naturally thought she wanted to play with him, and began to bark and jump on her, and Robin in trying to stop him stepped into Holliday's work basket, and all together pandemonium reigned.

Holliday dropped down on the couch and tried to keep Foxy off with a pillow, screaming, "Robin, make him stop. He's got my telegram! Susan, help me! Make the horrid little beast go away!"

I told her if she would just stop herself, and not act like a crazy person, we would stop the dog. Robin pulled him off and held his hand over his mouth, and I picked up the torn telegram. Holliday said to read it, so I

did. "My house at your disposal. Six months or year. Have wired Jones. W. S. BRAND."

I didn't wonder then that Holliday was excited. She says I stood with my mouth wide open for a whole minute. Lily brought me to my senses by asking, "Who is Jones?" as if anybody cared. Then I gasped, "Does he mean Christmas Tree House?"

"What else could he mean?" cried Holliday, and then she went off again, seizing me and dragging me around the room, till Foxy escaped and we had another scene. Presently I remembered that the boy was waiting and reminded her.

"Sensible Susan," she cried, "give me a pencil. To think of living in Christmas Tree House!"

She wrote to her father that it would be perfectly grand, and gave the note to Robin. "Take it down like a duck," she said, "and don't feel obliged to come back if you don't want to." After that we had some more raptures, which were not so bad now Foxy had departed.

Lily was still wondering who Jones was, and to quiet her we simply had to bring our

intellects to bear on the question, as Holliday said. We decided he must be somebody who attended to the Colonel's business.

"Well, I just wanted to know," she said, "and I should think, Holliday, you would be afraid to live there."

We both wished to know why, now the ghostly tree had been explained and the Colonel had had new panes put in the window!

"But queer things are always happening there. I'd be afraid," she insisted.

Holliday, who was at the bureau, arranging her hair, said that was too bad, for then Lily wouldn't want to come to her Hallowe'en party.

Lily said that was different. She meant to live there. She wouldn't mind a party.

"For my part I hope there will be some ghosts," Holliday announced.

"Now, Holliday, you don't really," I said, and she replied, "Oh, very well, Miss Maxwell, you know best, I suppose."

It didn't take long to settle it. Mr. Heywood had a talk with Mr. Jones, the Colonel's agent, and they didn't go to look at the Deane Avenue house at all. Mrs. Lawrence came on

Monday, and Holliday insisted on taking her to see Christmas Tree House straight from the station.

I was coming out of Browinski's when they passed, and she stopped the carriage and made me get in. I didn't want to, for I had on my old brown hat, that Mother made me wear because it looked like rain, but you can't resist Holliday. Mrs. Lawrence was very nice and pleasant, but so elegant, I could only hope she would not notice the mud on the toe of my shoe. Fortunately it took only about half a minute to get to Christmas Tree House from there, so there wasn't much time for her to dwell on my defects. Holliday told me afterwards that her aunt said I was a most attractive little girl, so perhaps she didn't notice my hat. But it seems to me after you are in your teens you aren't exactly a little girl.

Mrs. Lawrence was delighted with Christmas Tree House. She said it would be lovely to entertain in. Mr. Heywood added that it would be an expensive place to run; but when Holliday asked, "You can afford it, can't you, Papa?" he laughed and said he guessed it would not break him. Mrs. Boone says he has

made a lot of money in cotton. I asked Father why he didn't try cotton. He smiled and said it took money to make money.

Holliday and I squeezed hands as we went up the steps to the porch. It seemed too queer to be walking into the Colonel's house. Mr. Jones was waiting, and he and Mrs. Lawrence and Mr. Heywood began to talk business at once. Mrs. Lawrence makes me think of a queen. You feel as if she couldn't possibly do anything for herself, but she knows exactly what she wants other people to do.

The house really did suggest ghosts, with the furniture, pictures, and chandeliers all done up in white covers. Holliday and I wandered around by ourselves, and thought of the day when Robin ran away from us and we followed him and got shut in. We peeped into the east parlor, which used to be called the haunted room. Colonel Brand never used it, and there was very little furniture in it.

I couldn't think why Holliday wanted to go down to the basement, and she says she didn't know why herself, which is queer, for she walked straight to the door on the left of the entrance as you go in, and opened it. The

room we looked into was square, with two windows opening into the garden towards the Reynors', and one on the front steps that wind up to the porch. There was some old-fashioned furniture,—a bookcase, a large sofa, and a sort of office table. Holliday exclaimed, just as if she had known it all along, "Here is our school-room."

It was the very place for it. Mr. Heywood and Mrs. Lawrence both thought so when they saw it, and the more Holliday and I looked at it the more charmed we grew. There was a high mantel and a fireplace, and a chimney cupboard, and the window sills were broad enough to sit on with comfort. Holliday and I both love to sit on window sills. The cupboard was locked, and Holliday found the key in Saunders' basket. He is the negro man who takes care of the place, and he had been standing around with the keys ever since we came. We rather hoped to find something interesting, but the cupboard was bare, like old Mother Hubbard's. It was quite deep and paneled in wood, and had two shelves. Holliday said we could keep our valuable papers there.

Mr. Heywood laughed and pinched her ear

and wanted to know what valuable papers we had. He and Mrs. Lawrence drove back to the hotel, and Holliday and I walked home. At the corner I looked back at Christmas Tree House. With all the shutters open it seemed to have changed its mind and decided to be sociable after all.

After the Heywoods moved in, or walked in, rather, it looked much more so. Mrs. Lawrence knows the best place for everything. By putting a screen here and a table there, and moving the chairs about, she made it seem altogether different from the Colonel's house. There was a big palm in the hall, which the Seymours sent over, and ferns and other growing plants all about.

Holliday says her aunt is wild over the house, as if Mrs. Lawrence could be wild! She is going to entertain a great deal, Holliday says. Miss Josephine Seymour is to be married, and Marion is to make her *début* at the wedding. As Mrs. Seymour is not strong, Mrs. Lawrence is to chaperon Marion this winter.

The day after they moved in we were sitting in one of the school-room windows and Holli-

day was telling me this, when suddenly she grasped my arm. "Susan, look!" she exclaimed, and there, coming in the Reynors' front gate, was the man we saw on the country car. "The Worth While Man," Holliday calls him. "Do you know, Susan Maxwell," she continued, "I believe he is Miss Cornelia's boarder."

It turns out that he is, really, and stranger still, that he is Clarice's lover. Bessie told us that. Well, I am glad I don't have to live next door to him,—much more, have him for a lover. I shall always think he looks like Monsieur Rigaud. Bessie says Miss Cornelia thinks he is perfectly charming, but that the Poet doesn't like him.

Holliday had a beautiful letter from Miss Margaret, written just as they were sailing. She said: "I am so delighted to think of you and Susan in Christmas Tree House, for I know Susan will be there a great deal. It is hard for me to realize it is now my home, but I suppose it is, and I am counting on you to create a new atmosphere in the old house, in keeping with its cheerful name."

Holliday says she doesn't understand about creating atmosphere, and neither do I.

CHAPTER VI

HALLOWE'EN

HOLLIDAY stood on an upturned flower pot and rested her arms on top of the wall. "How can you create atmosphere, Mr. Reynor?" she asked.

The Poet, who was pacing back and forth on the gravel path of his own garden, his hands clasped behind his back, his head bowed, looked up in surprise. Shielded as he was from the street by a screen of shrubbery, and from his neighbors by a brick wall, his solitude had never before been thus invaded. Colonel Brand seldom walked in his garden, and when he did, kept strictly to his own domain. "I beg your pardon?" he said, pausing.

"Susan and I want to know how to create an atmosphere," Holliday repeated. "Susan, there is room for you here."

The footing offered was rather limited, but Susan made the venture. Her head came just above Holliday's shoulder as she stood beside her.

"Susan says you remind her of Mr. Cowper taking his winter morning walk," continued Holliday. "Only of course it is not winter."

"Unfortunately that is not the only discrepancy. Still, I thank you." Mr. Reynor bowed gravely.

"Oh, we like your poetry much better than his. Don't we, Susan?"

"Thank you again. I am unused to such appreciation. But about atmosphere,—are you writing something?"

"I didn't know atmosphere had anything to do with writing," Susan said, finding her voice.

"We mean in a house. Miss Margaret says in her letter, that she expects us to create a new atmosphere in Christmas Tree House."

"And if she expects it we have got to do it," Holliday added.

The Poet smiled. "It won't give you the least trouble. It is something you do without trying. Life undoubtedly leaves an impression upon houses and localities. Christmas Tree House, as you call it, has had a sad history. If I understand Mrs. Brand's meaning, she wishes you to have a happy winter there, and so overlay as it were the older,

sadder impressions with a new and different one."

"Like new paper on the wall," Holliday suggested. "It is rather a queer idea, isn't it, Susan?"

"Paper on the wall is not a bad simile. A piece of parchment which has been written over twice, is the more usual one. Palimpsest is the name for it."

At this point the conversation was brought to an abrupt close, for across the grass advanced Miss Cornelia's boarder, with his jaunty air of self-assurance. "Ah, Mr. Reynor! enjoying the sunshine, I see," he remarked, looking at Susan and Holliday and lifting his hat.

"I think the wind has changed," replied the Poet, glancing in the direction of the weather vanes on the Colonel's stable and turning on his heel.

If Mr. Lemoyne had expected to be presented to the young ladies, he was disappointed. He was left to twist his mustache alone.

"Mr. Reynor doesn't like their boarder. Lily says Miss Cornelia told her grandmother

so," remarked Holliday, as they went back to the house, across the garden, where Saunders was at work tying straw around the more delicate plants and putting things in trim for the winter. "Miss Cornelia said she couldn't imagine why, for Mr. Lemoyne had perfectly fascinating manners. So you see, Susan, Clarice isn't the only one. And you may say what you please, I do think he is stylish."

Certainly Mr. Lemoyne was a person you couldn't help noticing, whether you admired him or not. Nevertheless, Susan sympathized with the Poet.

"That is a very queer idea about atmosphere," Holliday went on. "When you think of it, it is a little creepy. But I'll tell you, Susan, we can create a lot of atmosphere of the right kind at the Hallowe'en party. I am going to have twelve. I have asked Clarice, and Nettie Tryon, Mr. Bright's niece, and the boys will be Tom Mann, Charlie Willard, Grayson Anderson, Phil Grant, and Ted Mark,—and Dick, of course. He is to get home that afternoon."

Clarice considered herself such a young lady, Susan wondered she cared to come; but she had

accepted, and so, as Holliday remarked, it was her own lookout.

In the story that Susan and Holliday set out to write for Miss Margaret that winter, there are many gaps; for one reason and another it dwindled at times to the merest record of events, but the story of the Hallowe'en party cannot be better told than by extracts from Holliday's account of it, written while the interest of it was still fresh.

The stately mansion known as Christmas Tree House was the scene of joyous revelry on the night of October thirty-first. It was not only Hallowe'en, the night when witches, fairies, and spirits of the departed are supposed to be abroad, it was also my birthday. As I shall probably never have another in this house, we decided to celebrate in a special way. Susan and I talked about it for weeks, and had enough brilliant ideas for ten parties. Aunt Nan convinced us of this when we confided them to her, and persuaded us to keep some of them for another time.

My guests were asked to supper at seven o'clock, and the first thing we did was to choose partners. Unfortunately, Dick Seymour's

train was late and at the last minute a telephone message came that he was just in, and would be over as soon as possible, but not to wait. While the boys stayed in the hall below, we girls went upstairs. Clarice was the most dressed up of any of us. She wore a sort of Greek dress of some soft white material, with a green girdle. Her hair was in a psyche knot, and she carried a big yellow chrysanthemum. She took Delsarte last summer, and it was a costume she wore at an exhibition. She whispered to me that Mr. Lemoyne said she was a poem in it.

We had six balls of yarn of different colors, one for each of us, and we were to stand together out of sight of the boys and drop them over the railing, keeping fast hold of the ends. The boy who caught your ball would of course be your partner. It seemed to me I had better take Dick, as without him we were an uneven number, but Susan said it would be more fun for me to throw with the rest, and let whoever was left have Dick.

The corners of Bessie's mouth turned down at this, as if she thought Susan was hoping to get Dick for herself. Susan doesn't do such

things, and Bessie knows it, but she has a suspicious nature.

The boys were subdued by Aunt Nan, who was going out to dinner and looked very grand. She has a way of making people afraid of her, though she doesn't mean it. Every now and then, however, you could hear Charlie's giggle.

It took some time to settle the question whether or not I was to throw, but finally I called "ready," and we tossed our balls over. Lily was so excited she dropped her end, but fortunately it caught on one of the spindles and she got it again. The rest of us held on, while the boys laughed and scrambled down in the hall. It was a wonder they didn't all break. Tom Mann pulled so hard Clarice lost her hold, which was a sign, Bessie told her, that she would not get married this year. Clarice didn't seem to like this till Susan reminded her there were just two more months, then she cheered up. Phil Grant caught Bessie's; Charlie, Nettie Tryon's; Ted Mark, Lily's; and Grayson Anderson, mine. Of all funny things, Susan's caught in the big palm and broke! Of course Bessie sang out, "Susan's going to be an old maid," but she is used to Bessie and

didn't seem to mind. Lily made us all laugh by saying, "Anyway, you can have Dick this evening." Then I remembered that Mrs. Seymour had sent that palm over from their greenhouse. If I had stopped to think I would not have mentioned it, for Susan hates to be teased, but I didn't, and Charlie made endless jokes about her ball being caught in Dick's palm. Susan grew red and dignified, but she stood it very well, and Aunt Nan came to the rescue.

They were all interested in seeing the house, particularly the east room where the spectral tree used to be. Grayson wanted to know if we had seen any ghosts. I told him no, but if there were any they would appear to-night, which made Lily uneasy.

Bessie said it would be a lovely place to dance, and taking hold of Susan, began to waltz around. Susan's bracelet came unclasped, the one that used to be Elsie Seymour's, and she slipped it off and put it on the mantel. Just then supper was announced. Of the bracelet "more anon," as they say in stories.

The table was lovely with a jack-o'-lantern

centerpiece, yellow-shaded candles, tiny jack-o'-lanterns at the boys' places and witches at the girls'. Fortunately Aunt Nan and Papa were dining out, so we could make all the noise we liked, without shocking anybody, and we were uproarious. Parker and Gertie had all they could do to keep their faces straight.

In the midst of the fun Dick arrived, taller than ever and looking very dignified and proper. When you haven't seen a person for a year you are apt to feel a little stiff at first, but if there was any ice it melted very quickly, as he took the vacant chair by Susan and Parker brought him the back numbers, as Tom expressed it.

Of course Charlie made a lot of fun over Susan's ball, but he couldn't tease Dick, who said as coolly as you please, that he was much obliged to the palm, and he hoped Susan would make the best of it, as she had on another occasion.

My birthday cake was a beauty, with its yellow candy roses and fifteen yellow candles, and I might linger upon it if so much had not happened later. We were to finish our

celebration in the school-room, which seemed more suitable than the Colonel's library for such undignified games as bobbing for apples and so on. Papa put his foot down that we were not to do anything scary, like going into a dark room alone with a candle and standing before a mirror, which was a disappointment to me.

When supper was over we marched down to the school-room by way of the front porch and the garden, and in at the back door of the basement, carrying jack-o'-lanterns which the boys had fastened on long sticks. In the school-room a surprise awaited some of us.

Instead of being perfectly dark as I had expected, before the fireplace stood a tall veiled figure, holding a lighted torch in one hand and a box in the other. It was strange and mysterious indeed. I was taken completely by surprise. Lily gave a gasp, and Charlie whispered, "Shut up, Lil;" and then as we paused before the veiled figure, she called my name and said:

"You as a child of Hallowe'en
Many fearsome sights have seen.
Perchance with fairies you have talked,
Or else with ghostly forms have walked,

To you belongs a mystic power;
It you must employ this hour.
To you I give a torch of fire
To light fair summer's funeral pyre.
The sacred flames that on this night
Kneeling before this hearth you light,
Gleaming and mounting as they burn,
Herald winter's quick return."

She handed me the torch and went on:

"Loved of the Fairies, e'er I go
'Tis yours fair fortunes to bestow.
For each within this casket lies
A talisman in strange disguise."

She gave me the casket and in solemn majesty left the room.

As I knelt to light the fire I felt almost as if I had some mysterious power. Charlie's laugh broke the spell, and I heard Phil whisper, "She was great, wasn't she?"

The fire blazed beautifully, and we sat on the floor in a double semicircle before it and I opened the casket. Around the room the jack-o'-lanterns grinned at us. The casket was really a lovely Japanese jewel box, a birthday present from the boys, and in it were a dozen tiny spades.

"Susan Maxwell, I know you had something to do with this," I cried. "A dozen morals all at once!"

But Susan insisted that she hadn't.

Lily of course did not see how shovels could be talismans, until Dick explained very politely that it meant that if we expected good fortune this year we must dig for it. Then she remembered the Wise Man, and made connection, as Charlie said.

Clarice looked as if she thought it all rather silly, and just then Parker announced from the door, a gentleman for Miss Dumont.

Clarice jumped up in great haste. "Good-night, everybody," she said, "and don't come, Holliday, please. Gertie will help me with my things. I have had a lovely time."

She seemed so determined and went off in such a hurry that I let her go alone. Then I began to think it wasn't very polite in me, but Susan said she was going up to get something she had left in the library, and that would do. She didn't say what it was, but it turned out later to be her bracelet, which she had forgotten till then.

As I stood undecided, Bessie wondered why Clarice had to go so early, and I explained that when I invited her she had said she might have to go soon after supper.

Charlie said, "Let's all go up and see her off. A ghost might catch her," and so we all raced after Susan.

The basement stairs lead up into a back hall, and as we reached the top we heard the strangest sound, as if somebody were trying to scream and couldn't, and there was Susan with her hands at her throat, catching her breath in a queer way. We took her into the front hall and made her sit down, and Lily suggested a glass of water. It sounds when I tell it very much more calm than it was. Everybody talked at once and begged Susan to tell what was the matter. Lily's idea was not a bad one, for after Tom brought the water and Susan had swallowed some, she found her voice. Something in the east room had frightened her, she said. There was some one there.

"Burglars! Burglars!" cried Lily, "Oh—oh!"

If anything will make you calm and composed, it is to have Lily go off the handle. It worked like a charm with Susan. She began to realize that whatever had happened, nothing could harm her now with all of us there.

She explained that after she started, she remembered her bracelet was on the mantel in the east parlor. So she went through the dining-room, which is the nearest way. As she pushed aside the hangings of the door, it seemed as if the light went out, but it may have seemed so because she expected to find the room light.

At this point in her story Clarice came trailing downstairs, wanting to know what was the matter, and at the same moment who should come out of the drawing-room but Miss Cornelia's boarder! He asked if there was anything wrong, and if he could be of any service, and Clarice said, "Mr. Lemoyne, Miss Heywood." It dawned upon me then that he had come for her.

Dick asked, "Susan, how do you know there was somebody there?"

Susan said she wasn't frightened at first, although she was surprised to find the room dark, but remembering exactly where she had put her bracelet, she felt her way to the mantel, which is near the door, and reached up for it. As she did so she touched another hand.

At this Mr. Lemoyne sensibly suggested that we'd better investigate, and he smiled in the way Susan says is like Monsieur Rigaud. You could see he thought it was all foolishness. So we moved in a body to the east parlor, and one of the boys lighted the gas. There on the mantel lay Susan's bracelet, but no burglar or any one else was to be seen.

Mr. Lemoyne, who stood at the door with Clarice, remarked that on Hallowe'en one's imagination was apt to be keyed up, and he smiled again at Susan. Then he and Clarice left, saying we had enough protectors without them. After that we searched the house from top to bottom, without finding anybody, or any evidence that any one had escaped, for the doors and windows were all fastened on the inside. But it was queer and mysterious, for Parker insisted that he had left the light burning in the east room.

Dick said he might have turned it out absent-mindedly, and Charlie said it was the ghost, more to tease Lily than anything else. Tom added that ghosts were thin air, which would not square with Susan's belief that she

had touched a hand. So they went on arguing about it after we went back to the school-room and our interrupted revels. Bessie said it was all Susan's imagination, and Dick suggested that it might have been the velvet mat under one of the bronze ornaments on the mantel, that felt like a hand. Susan didn't say anything then, but she told me afterwards the hand had a ring on it. It sounds gruesome to speak of a hand as if there were no person attached to it.

We turned on all the lights there were, for the rest of the evening, and we bobbed for apples and roasted chestnuts and did other customary things, but the spell was broken. Susan was very quiet and said her head ached, and Lily kept looking over her shoulder.

After they had left and I was telling Papa and Aunt Nan about it, I picked up from the hearth of the east room a small enameled pin. A society pin of some kind, Papa said. It doesn't belong to any of the boys. Mr. Lemoyne wasn't in the room, so it can't be his. We don't know what to think.

After I was in bed I remembered that I

had not guessed who the lady with the torch was. Susan's fright had put it out of my mind. There was something familiar in her voice. I went to sleep trying to place it.

CHAPTER VII

AT LILY'S

IT gradually came to be the accepted opinion that Susan's imagination was to blame for her fright on Hallowe'en. At times she half believed it herself. Her surprise at finding the room dark, the old ghost story, and the atmosphere of mystery prepared the way for uncanny suggestions. Yet there were moments when the recollection of the touch of that hand in the darkness was too vivid to be thus explained away. Often when she was in the dark alone she remembered it.

There was the little pin found by Holliday, too, to be accounted for. For all any one knew it might have been lying at the edge of the rug for some time. There had been numerous workmen of one sort or another about the house, and one of them might have lost it. Mr. Heywood said it seemed to him more sensible to accept some simple and reasonable explanation of the occurrence, even if there were flaws in the evidence. Nobody be-

lieved in ghosts, and if it was a burglar, he had disappeared without doing any harm, or leaving any trace of his flight. On the whole the imagination theory offered fewer objections than any other.

“We don’t want to start any more stories about Miss Margaret’s house,” Holliday said one Saturday morning at Lily’s. “Particularly when she has asked us to create a new atmosphere. So let’s agree not to talk about it.”

It was the custom to hold an occasional mending meeting on Saturday mornings, when there was nothing else of importance on hand. Bessie, who belonged to a large family and was a helpful little person, was the only one who had much mending to do. The Mann darning bag was always full. But if you hadn’t any mending you could bring your fancy work.

Lily’s room was the gathering-place this morning, and she had received with much complacency the many admiring comments upon her new wall paper, which with its pink roses exactly matched the chintz hangings and couch cover. Her doting grandmamma had

had it done for her birthday two months ago.

"Show them the inside of your bureau drawers, Lily," said Bessie.

Lily, not at all unwilling, pulled open a drawer and displayed an interior lined with dotted muslin over pink. "Like a baby basket," Susan said. From it floated the fragrance of violets.

"Did you do it? How lovely!" exclaimed Nettie Tryon, who had come with Susan. Her uncle, Mr. Bright, had asked that she might join their class, and as she was a stranger, as well as the niece of the popular rector, everybody was being nice to her, as Mrs. Boone expressed it.

"No, indeed; Grandma did it," answered Lily. "And would you like to see my new dressing-gown and slippers?"

They would, of course; so more pinkness was brought forth and duly admired.

"You certainly ought to take a rose-colored view of life, Lily," remarked Holli-day.

"Pink is my color, you know," Lily answered.

Mrs. Boone looked in at this moment, with

a cheery "Good-morning, girls. Yes, pink's Lily's color, though she looks pretty in blue, too. Lucinda is making crullers this morning, and I told her to send up some as soon as they were done. Lily says your party was lovely, Holliday."

This led them back to Hallowe'en and Holliday's suggestion not to encourage any stories about Christmas Tree House.

"And, girls!" she exclaimed, "I have just found out about Miss Grant. I never suspected for a minute that she was the lady with the torch. Finally I began to wonder what had become of her, after she left us, you know, and I asked Gertie. She knew about it, and so did Aunt Nan."

"I knew all the time. Tom made me promise not to tell," said Bessie. "The boys wanted to get up some kind of a surprise for you. It was Charlie who thought of asking Miss Grant to help. She has started a club for some of the boys. It meets on Friday nights. Tom belongs."

"That explains why Charlie asked me so many questions about what we were going to do at the party," remarked Susan. "I sup-

pose it was Miss Grant who thought of the spades."

"Of course," answered Bessie; "the boys would never think of anything like that. Do you know," she asked, suddenly changing the subject, "that Clarice is going to be a boarder at Mrs. Knight's?"

"She told me she was going for two hours every day, to take literature and history," said Holliday, opening her work-bag and peering within. "I do believe I have forgotten my thimble."

Bessie slipped her darning egg into position under a large hole. "She was, until her mother found out about the other evening. Mrs. Dumont thought of course Clarice would come home with us. Instead of that she went to the flower show with Mr. Lemoyne."

There were exclamations over this. "Really and truly, Bessie?" Holliday said, "I thought when Parker said some one had come for her that it must be her father, and when I saw Mr. Lemoyne I was surprised."

"She thought she could slip away without anybody knowing, but Susan spoiled that," replied Bessie.

"Don't you think it was rather underhand?" asked Nettie Tryon.

"I don't care what you say," announced Holliday, triumphantly producing her thimble at length, "I am sorry for Clarice. Her mother is always wrangling with her about something. Clarice says if she hated Mr. Lemoyne, her mother would make her see him."

"That isn't a very nice way to speak of her mother," Susan suggested.

"It is easy for you to talk, Susan, when you have a perfectly nice and reasonable mother. Clarice has to confide in some one. Mr. Lemoyne has been lovely to her. He lends her books about art and poetry. I really think he has a very good influence over her," Holliday concluded with an air of extreme wisdom.

"Does he know her mother doesn't like him?" asked Nettie.

"Clarice says she was insulting to him, so I suppose he must," answered Holliday.

"It must be very interesting to have a grown-up lover," remarked Lily, rolling her eyes sentimentally. "Grandma says she

would put me in a convent if I were like Clarice."

"Perhaps that wouldn't be so interesting," laughed Susan.

"Susan and I know something about Mr. Lemoyne that no one else knows," said Holliday.

"And we have a piece of something that once belonged to him,—at least, Holliday has," added Susan.

This naturally aroused some curiosity, which the girls refused to gratify.

"I know, it is about the book he is writing," said Lily.

"So far as I know it isn't, but it might be," Holliday replied enigmatically. "That reminds me, Miss Cornelia says she would like to have the Golden Thimbles meet next Friday afternoon. Everybody is asked to bring ideas for making money for the hospital."

Bessie went home with Susan to get a story book which was being passed around the circle. "It is so peaceful and orderly over here," she remarked with a sigh as they mounted the stairs to Susan's room. "It must be nice to be an only child."

"I am not an only child," said Susan.

"Well, it is just the same. Your brother is so much older. What is yours is all your own. I have to have Patsy in my room, and she will use my things, and Mother just laughs. I can't keep anything in order. I'd think I was in heaven if I had a room like this."

Susan looked around her room. It was not elaborate like Lily's, but pretty and girlish. Muslin curtains with fluted ruffles at the windows, fluted ruffles on the pillow covers, dressing-table, and high old-fashioned bureau. Matting on the floor with a few blue rugs, and everywhere her own special treasures, photographs of the girls and boys, and knickknacks of many kinds.

"I love flutes," continued Bessie, "but there are too many of us to think of it. I should love to have you meet at our house sometimes, on Saturday mornings, but my room isn't nice, and Carrie is always practicing in the parlor, and Grandpa sits in the library. Our house is always full of people." Again Bessie sighed.

Bessie's room wasn't nice, Susan knew. It

was furnished with left-overs, an oak bed and bureau and a walnut wardrobe. The carpet was worn, and there weren't any curtains. Dimly Susan was beginning to realize that this might have something to do with Bessie's sharpness. There were ten children at the Manns', and as the Brocade Lady once remarked, Bessie was the odd one among the girls. Carrie was the oldest, Ellie was delicate, Patsy was the beauty, and Florrie was the baby; there seemed nothing to distinguish Bessie particularly.

"I don't mean," Bessie added, "that I wish there weren't so many of us, but just that there were more things and room."

Bessie had never spoken like this before, Susan thought as she put away her hat and coat and sat down to make out her weekly accounts. She liked Bessie better than she used to, now she had learned to control her foolish sensitiveness a little and not mind teasing so much.

Bessie rarely had a new dress. Most of hers were made over out of Ellie's and Carrie's. She didn't have an allowance either, just some change now and then when she needed it espe-

cially. Susan had a dollar a week, out of which she paid her church money and her car fare, and besides this she had a savings account. "Susan Hermione is a thrifty lass," Joe used to say.

There was one thing they had all noticed,—Miss Grant seemed to like Bessie better than any of them. Holliday had remarked upon it to Susan. "I don't *mind* it," she explained, "but I do think it is queer, for honestly I don't think Bessie is quite as nice as the rest of us. Do you?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE THIMBLES MEET

MISS CORNELIA'S boarder, as he was frequently called, was not a person to be ignored. He did not hide his light under a bushel by any means. He was referred to as a real acquisition to local society; and the Poet might shrug his shoulders as he pleased, it had no effect. A most versatile person, a charming talker, so interested in art, and kindred subjects,—these were the remarks heard on every side concerning Mr. Lemoyne.

Miss Cornelia was warm in his defense where Clarice was concerned. People were so ready to misunderstand, she said. He had met her at some resort and become interested in a fatherly way in the child. He felt Clarice was hampered by her environment. Everybody knew Mrs. Dumont was a silly woman. Miss Cornelia was certain Mr. Lemoyne had been unaware that Clarice had gone out with him against her mother's wishes. Of course he

was too much of a gentleman to say so. "It seems to me a great thing for Clarice to have such a friend," she said in conclusion.

The Brocade Lady, to whom she was speaking, replied that it was quite possible that the gentleman meant well, but she had her doubts as to the wisdom of such a friendship for Clarice.

"But if it should lead to something more serious,—that is what you mean, I suppose," cried the sentimental Miss Reynor, "don't you think it might be the best thing for her? Doesn't she need a guiding hand?"

"I don't know that I meant anything of the sort. I haven't met your boarder, but from what you tell me I should not expect him to be seriously drawn to a little goose like Clarice. She is a colorless little soul, with the sort of nerves that result from being brought up on coffee and the theater from babyhood. You are certain he is not simply amusing himself?"

Miss Cornelia indignantly repudiated the thought. Mr. Lemoyne had such nice ideas. Under a cross-examination these might have been reduced to an appreciation, gracefully

expressed, of such things as black bean soup and beaten biscuit. His hostess felt it an indication of sterling character that he preferred his biscuits thin and brown, and his bacon crisp.

He had spoken with considerable amusement of the excitement over the supposed burglar, at Christmas Tree House, on Hallowe'en. He gave Miss Cornelia the impression it was largely through his efforts that confidence had been restored. She felt it to be providential that he happened to be there.

On the occasion of the first meeting of the circle of girls known as the Golden Thimbles, of which Miss Margaret had asked her to take charge this winter, Miss Reynor asked Mr. Lemoyne to speak to them on some instructive subject after the business was over. The fame of this talk on "Harmony of Form and Function" went abroad and resulted in a class in the history of art, which he undertook at the earnest solicitation of somebody, modestly disclaiming any fitness for it beyond a somewhat extensive reading, and a familiarity with European galleries.

There were some persons who, like Susan,

could never rid themselves of the feeling that Mr. Lemoyne was laughing inwardly, and a few others who with Mr. Reynor failed to be impressed by his gifts; but behind this there might have been a little jealousy.

The Poet might say what he pleased, that talk on "Harmony of Form and Function" was the beginning of a needed reform. The artistic value of plush-covered rolling-pins as key racks, of match boxes in the form of slippers, and so on, began to be questioned. Less ribbon was threaded through fret work, the name of Royal Worcester ceased to be blindly worshiped, and decalcomaniacs, as the Brocade Lady named them, disappeared from the land.

The "Thimbles," as the circle was usually called for short, had grown since the winter when its members made Lenore's wardrobe. It numbered twelve or fifteen now, and was regarded as a valuable auxiliary to the Hospital Guild. But at this first meeting it was by the hardest that any decisions were reached, Miss Cornelia was so afraid of not doing exactly as Miss Margaret would wish, and so ignorant of parliamentary rules.

One thing was certain, Holliday said, they

must make some money for the children's ward. Mrs. Carrol's bequest had proved such a disappointment, they must try to make up for it; and besides, Susie Flynn, the little girl they had been interested in for so long, was now being treated at the hospital, for spinal trouble.

"It is easy enough to say we must, but how?" demanded Bessie.

"Grandma says she'll give us some towels to hemstitch," said Lily.

"I don't see what we can do besides making things for our table at the bazaar," said somebody else; and Miss Cornelia, who loved fancy work, had a great many suggestions to offer here.

"Of course we shall have our table, but we can beg a lot of things for it. I want to do something else, something bigger," Holliday urged. "Of course it is easy to say it, Bessie, but if somebody doesn't say it, we won't begin."

The discussion at this time, however, came to nothing, and it was left for Mr. Lemoyne to offer the first really feasible plan.

As it was the opening meeting, Miss Cornelia departed from the usual custom and

served chocolate and cake, and while this was being handed, after that epoch-making talk, as the Poet sarcastically characterized it, Mr. Lemoyne sought the corner of the room where Holliday sat with Nettie Tryon and Susan. The latter, who was still secretary, was struggling to bring order out of some confused notes, and did not see him till he was upon them and it was impossible to get away without being rude.

The more affable and gracious Mr. Lemoyne was, the more shy and uncomfortable Susan grew. To his hope that she had not seen or felt any more ghosts, she had nothing to reply. She felt that he regarded her as merely a silly little girl. But Holliday more than made up for Susan's unresponsiveness.

She referred to the day when he had picked up her bag on the car, and thought it was funny that he had come to live next door to her. Mr. Lemoyne replied that it was she who had come next door to him, for he was here first, and this was the occasion of a great deal of argument and laughter.

He expressed a great admiration for Christmas Tree House, inquired about the name,

and wondered if sometime he might be allowed to go over it. Art, it seemed, was entirely by the way, with him. He was deeply engrossed at present in his book, "Southern Homes." It was to be illustrated with all sorts of charming bits of detail, from gates, doorways, mantels, and so on, he explained.

Chimney cupboards chanced to be mentioned, and Mr. Lemoyne was interested to hear of the one in the school-room. He asked a number of questions. Were there not others in the house? he wished to know. He added that the Brocade Lady had promised to show him over her cottage, a charmingly quaint place.

It was Nettie who wondered if Mr. Lemoyne could not tell them of some way of making money.

Such charming young ladies surely ought to be able to command all the money they wanted, he said. Why not give a series of costume teas?—a colonial tea, a flower tea. Get some friends to furnish a little music, and the thing was done. Pretty girls in costume were a sure attraction to begin with.

Holliday clapped her hands and stood up.

“Everybody listen,” she cried; “Mr. Lemoyne has a perfectly grand plan.”

The idea of dressing up seldom fails to charm the girlish heart, and did not this time. Even Susan reluctantly warmed to the plan as it unfolded. Miss Cornelia said they might have the first one there, and Holliday knew Aunt Nan would let her have the next.

Mr. Lemoyne laughingly advised them to settle upon very simple refreshments. Miss Reynor was not to be trusted in such matters, and would bankrupt herself and everybody concerned, if unrestrained.

Miss Cornelia pretended to be hurt, but was in reality immensely flattered, as any could see.

In the confusion of good-bys and departures, Mr. Lemoyne contrived an aside to Holliday. “Be kind to my little friend if you see her, and tell her not to forget,” he said.

Holliday thrilled with the significance of this. She didn’t mention it to Susan, but the next afternoon went to see Clarice. She found that young lady in a pensive mood, but not without enjoyment in her martyrdom.

“You see how adorable he is,” she ex-

claimed. "And to think that I am denied the solace of his presence!"

"He really does seem devoted to you, Clarice," Holliday said. "Perhaps in another year your parents will relent."

Clarice looked at the ceiling. "We little guess what may happen in a year," she replied oracularly.

CHAPTER IX

TRIFLES

“SUSAN, I wish you would run over to the grocery and telephone to the plumber. The kitchen boiler is leaking.”

“Oh, Mother, couldn’t Silvy go?—or Sam? I hate to telephone.”

“Sam is not here and I can’t spare Silvy. Nonsense, Susan.”

Susan put down her book reluctantly. If she had not felt cross she might have laughed at the number of s’s in her mother’s reply. That boiler had a provoking habit of leaking at the most inconvenient times. It was Friday, and she had planned such a pleasant afternoon. She liked to lay out her afternoons in her own mind in an interesting, orderly fashion. When she finished her chapter she intended to cross-stitch awhile, enjoying the next chapter in prospect; then she would crochet two inches on the edging the Brocade Lady had taught her; after that she would write a little on the

story, and then return with a virtuous mind to her book. This program was to be enlivened all the way through by a box of chocolate mints.

Wink lay curled on the hearth rug; a long red bud on the rubber plant was just about to uncurl into a leaf. Who would not have disliked to be disturbed under such circumstances? Besides, as Susan said, she hated to telephone. At this time telephones had not yet become the necessity they are considered now. Business and professional people had them, and luxurious people like the Seymours and Heywoods, but others still ran over to the drug store or grocery.

"Run along, dear, before the leak gets worse. It will take you but a minute."

For some reason it is extremely provoking to be told to run along. "I suppose I'll have to go, but I'll walk," Susan said to herself as her mother left the room.

Although Susan was overcoming her shyness, there were times when she reverted to her former state, forgetting, as Joe would have said, that as a general thing people do not bite. All the telephones were so high that she had

to stand on tiptoe, which was dreadfully tiresome, and she couldn't bear to ask a clerk to call up for her, although that pleasant Mr. Smith at the drug store had offered to do it any time. The drug store was better than the grocery, however, and almost as near, in another direction. Susan reluctantly walked towards it.

When she reached the door she was sorry she had not tried the grocery, for it seemed full of people, among them Charlie Willard and Phil Grant. She quickly decided to go on to Browinski's, which was only a block farther. There it was no better, for Miss Carrie was taking a long order over the 'phone, and while she waited Susan's small stock of courage ebbed away. Browinski himself was having an argument with some man over the counter, and talking very loud. In such a racket she knew she could not hear a word. After all, the plumber's shop was only four blocks away now, and she might as well go there. So, just as Miss Carrie hung up the receiver, she slipped out of the store.

Susan heaved a relieved sigh as she left the plumber's. Of course she knew she had been

a goose, but then she couldn't help it. She had a perfect right to walk to the plumber's if she wanted to. Then she decided she would go home by St. Mark's and see how nearly the chapel was finished.

But now she discovered that by shirking one disagreeable thing she had encountered another, for as she turned the corner by the rectory Mrs. Seymour and Dick stood on the church steps. For some reason telephoning at once began to seem as nothing, compared with the ordeal of speaking to Mrs. Seymour. The lady was indeed a somewhat formidable person, and Susan knew her very slightly, but after Elsie's death she had sent her that pretty bracelet with a very kind note. Of course she must speak to her. It was too late to turn back, for they might have seen her.

For a minute Susan wavered and came near slipping back around the corner, on the chance that she had not been seen. Then something she had heard Miss Grant say, rose before her: "Do the hard thing or the disagreeable thing quickly, without thinking too much about it, without arguing;" and sudden courage or something as good came to the girl who

couldn't telephone, and she walked straight on.

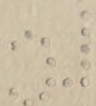
Dick came down the steps as she approached. "Won't you come and see the window, Susan? It is just in. We were speaking of you when you turned the corner."

With very pink cheeks and a thumping heart Susan reached the top step and spoke to Dick's mother. Mrs. Seymour still wore black, and it did not require much experience to recognize signs of serious illness in her face. Her manner was gentle and languid. She held Susan's hand and smiled kindly upon her.

"We have put in a window to Elsie, Susan, and I want you to see it, among the first," she said, drawing her towards the door.

Susan has never forgotten that afternoon; how she sat on the chancel step, her hand in Mrs. Seymour's, and gazed at the beautiful figure of the Angel of the Resurrection, while the Poet played a soft, flowing melody on the organ.

"You like it?" Mrs. Seymour asked at length.





"SUSAN HAS NEVER FORGOTTEN THAT AFTERNOON."

“Oh!” cried Susan, quite forgetful of herself, “it reminds me of Elsie when—the day—”

Mrs. Seymour understood and pressed her hand. “I wanted you to see it, to be one of the first,” she repeated; and she added, what always seemed so incredible to Susan, that she was like Elsie.

“I am not really,” she exclaimed. “I am such a dreadful goose.” And then she was overwhelmed at having said so silly a thing.

Mrs. Seymour smiled. “Dick and I believe nothing of the sort,” she said. “He told me how those beautiful lines of Wordsworth’s reminded you of Elsie, and they have given me the greatest pleasure. You are full of a lovely and delicate feeling.”

Combined happiness and shyness quite overwhelmed Susan, and it was a relief to have the Poet stop his music and come down to speak to Mrs. Seymour. While they talked, Mr. Bright entered from the vestry with Mr. Seymour.

Susan sat by herself and looked at the angel, reluctant to leave it. With the late sunshine on the chancel windows, and the shadows deep-

ening in the church below, it shone forth in a wonderful white radiance. St. Mark's was beautiful this afternoon.

Presently Nettie Tryon and Robin came in, and this gave Susan an excuse for lingering and talking about Elsie to Nettie.

"I was a little bit of a boy when Elsie went to Heaven, but I remember her, don't I, Susan?" Robin said, sitting in a front pew and swinging his heels.

Mr. and Mrs. Seymour left, and the others came over for a nearer view of the window. Mr. Bright wished to know how the little Presbyterian, which was his name for Susan, liked the Wise Man's tablet.

"I like it, but I'd rather have a window," Susan answered.

"You see, Nettie," said Robin, pointing with a grimy finger toward the memorial, "he built his house on a rock instead of on the sand. If you build a house on the sand, it tumbles down."

"What do you have to do in order to get a good foundation, Robin?" his father asked, smiling.

"You have to dig," and Robin went through

the motions with such earnestness that his face grew red.

“Digging, you see, is hard work,” remarked Mr. Reynor.

“Yes; still you not only get a good foundation, but you unearth many a jewel by the way,” added Mr. Bright. “However, don’t any of you repeat that, for it is out of my next Sunday’s sermon.”

Upon this friendly and instructive conversation entered Miss Cornelia Reynor and her boarder. They had been to see the Brocade Lady’s cottage, and Mr. Lemoyne suggested looking at the church as they passed. Mr. Bright joined them and did the honors; the others dispersed.

“I don’t like that man,” said Dick, as he and Susan walked down the street.

“Neither do I,” agreed Susan; “I feel as if he were laughing at me, always.”

“Why should he laugh at you?” Dick had a way of asking practical questions that made one feel a little foolish.

“I don’t know. I suppose he thinks I was silly on Hallowe’en.”

“It was very natural for you to be frightened. Any one would have been.”

“ I don’t like that sort of a turned-up mustache,” Susan owned.

“ I don’t mind his mustache, but I saw him kick Rex the other day, quite inexcusably. A gentleman doesn’t kick a dog,—not one like Rex,” said Dick. This unanimity of feeling in regard to Mr. Lemoyne added to their pleasant sense of friendship.

Dick went on to say he did like Mr. Reynor. There was a lot in him you would never guess.

Silvy had stirred the fire in the dining-room, so that it was blazing brightly when Susan got home. On the table lay her book, her work-basket, the box of mints; everything was waiting for her but the afternoon. It was gone. Wynkyns, aroused by her entrance, stretched himself to the utmost limits and yawned.

Susan dropped down on the rug. “ Wynkie, I came so near turning back, and if I had—! It was such a little hard thing, but I did it, and I found a jewel. Wynk, it is nice to have people like you.”

Wynkyns made no effort to understand, but merely purred comfortably. If Susan was happy, who cared for details?

CHAPTER X

MISS GRANT

SHE was not like Miss Margaret, the sort of person you were wild about and fell in love with, and dreamed of by day and night, as Holliday expressed it. Yet it was impossible not to like Miss Grant when you had been thrown with her for a time. You began, at first unconsciously, to value her friendship and to try to live up to her standards.

She was not beautiful, but there was something fine and wholesome about her. She looked strong and kind, and was full of a breezy independence. Her name, Anne Mary, suited her. Her father, Judge Grant, a popular and genial gentleman, had always lived in an open-handed fashion to the very limit of his income. Anne Mary was the oldest child and only daughter, and she felt her responsibility towards her five younger brothers, who must be educated and started in life. Her mother

was a semi-invalid, accustomed to all sorts of indulgences and luxuries, and though the Judge talked about economizing, now Frank was in college and Rob in a preparatory school, he hardly knew the meaning of the word. So Anne Mary decided that she must at least take care of herself, and perhaps help with the boys. Besides Miss Margaret's class, she did a little tutoring now and then, and was studying for a degree, Bessie said.

The Grants were neighbors of the Manns, and Bessie knew more about Miss Grant than the others did. Besides, as Holliday remarked to Susan, Miss Grant certainly seemed to like her best. It wasn't that she showed any partiality in school hours, but she evidently liked Bessie's company. She singled her out as a companion on her country walks, and occasionally asked favors of her. Bessie was always ready to do anything for you, she said one day.

This was perfectly true, though the statement came at first as a surprise. When Susan tore her dress at the picnic, it was Bessie who repaired it temporarily. When Robin Bright fell and cut his head, Bessie was the one to

know what to do and do it promptly. When Lily upset the ink, Bessie had it nearly all soaked up from the rug with blotting paper while Holliday was calling Gertie. The trouble was she so often spoiled her good deeds by sharp and egotistical remarks.

Miss Grant understood Bessie, because she had been a plain little girl herself, with a longing for appreciation. She knew the temptation to be critical and sharp at sight of others winning, apparently without effort, the praise you long for, and perhaps really deserve. When she commented on her helpfulness, Bessie flushed with pleasure and exclaimed, "I like to do things."

On those Friday afternoon walks, under the influence of friendly companionship, Bessie revealed her longing to be pretty, and to have things like the other girls. At these times it was an easy matter to sow a little seed. To suggest that after all, in the long run, however desirable beauty is, it is kindness and sympathy that attract, and to add laughingly that Bessie herself was at times a little too much like the gingerbread into which the cook put a spoonful of red pepper by mistake. It would

have been delicious with the pepper left out, or with just the merest pinch.

She did not stop here. One day when Dr. Mann called to see her mother, Miss Grant followed him to the door and asked about that capable little daughter of his.

"Do you mean Bessie?" asked the doctor, in surprise. "She is capable. Her sharp nose is into everything. She is the most dependable child we have." He laughed.

"I hope you tell her so sometimes," Miss Grant suggested.

This set the busy doctor thinking as he drove away. Bessie certainly looked after his comfort more than any of the others. Now he thought of it he realized how often he heard somebody say, "Oh, Bessie will do it." He said it himself. She was a queer, snappy child.

Those tiny spades which Miss Grant had found at a toy store and converted into talismans for Hallowe'en, proved a happy thought. Holliday set the fashion by tying a bow of ribbon on hers and pinning it on her dress. The other girls followed suit. Now that they no longer had the Wise Man's gravestone before them every day, the spades would remind

them of their promise to Miss Margaret to work faithfully.

Miss Grant liked the moral of it. It was plain and practical, not in the least high flown, and capable of numberless helpful applications.

Miss Grant, being the sister of so many brothers, knew a great deal about boys. The best chum she had was her brother Phil, a mischievous, irresponsible boy of sixteen, a boon companion of Charlie Willard's. Observing how often these two got into mischief on Friday evenings, she started the Friday Club. It was to be social and literary to begin with, and anything else, later on, that seemed desirable.

Biographies of famous men was their subject for the winter, and it was Charlie who discovered that all the great men they read about were diggers; and then some one made the suggestion that they call their club "Spades." It would be an unusual name, and both humorous and serious as you pleased, and there were the badges ready to hand.

Miss Grant suggested that it would be courtesy to ask the permission of the girls to

adopt this symbol, as the Wise Man was in a way their peculiar property. Masculine dignity was at first inclined to object. It did not wish to be beholden to the girls. On the other hand, "Spades" was too good a name to surrender.

"It's a Bible story," cried Charlie. "They haven't got a corner on the Bible, have they?"

"Don't be a pig, Charlie. Let's ask them. What's the harm?" Dick said sensibly.

They were left to argue it out, and in the end good manners and common sense triumphed, and the little spades became a friendly link between the boys and girls. Before the winter was over, Thimbles and Spades did some good work together.

The Poet heard about the new club from Dick. "Do you know Miss Grant?" the latter asked. "She's dandy."

Mr. Reynor replied he had once known her, when they were both children, and that he understood she was a very brilliant person.

Dick agreed that she knew a lot, but it wasn't that you cared so much about. She

was, well—all right. That was as near as he could come to it.

The Poet's acquaintance with Miss Grant dated back to dancing-school days. Sturdy Annie May had laughed at him because he couldn't run as fast as she, and once when he slipped and fell on the polished floor, and the excitement as well as the hurt brought tears to his eyes, she had called, "Cry baby!" In those days Reggie had hated Annie May, and the Poet remembered it and did not particularly care to meet Miss Grant.

As they lived in the same part of town and had the same friends, that they should meet sometime was inevitable. As it was, it chanced to be at Miss Seymour's wedding, early in December.

This was a very grand affair, being also the occasion of Miss Marion's début. Holliday and Lily were asked to be ribbon girls, an honor that pleased them greatly and made them objects of envy.

"Miss Josephine asked them because they are pretty and can have lovely dresses," Bessie said bluntly.

Susan reminded her that Mrs. Lawrence was

very intimate with the Seymours, and the Boones were distantly related, but Bessie tossed her head.

It was queer and a little uncomfortable, Susan felt, to have Holliday on such intimate terms with Lily, and to have no part in their conferences. But as no other girls of their age were asked to the wedding, there was no cause to feel slighted.

Mr. Reynor reluctantly accompanied his sister. Miss Grant very cheerfully went with her father. The Judge and Miss Cornelia were kindred spirits, and quickly spied each other out.

“How do you do, sir?” the Judge said to the Poet. “Of course you know my daughter? Anne Mary, you know Mr. Reynor? Writing much poetry these days?”

Although the Poet knew it was no disgrace to write verses, he shrank exactly as if it were; but Miss Grant gave him a cordial hand-clasp and said nothing about poetry, to his relief. What she did say was something about Dick, and the new club. Had he heard about Spades? With this beginning they got on very well.

On the way home Miss Cornelia said she had never seen Anne Mary look so well. Her brother answered absently. He was wondering if Miss Grant had ever read any of his poems.

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS TREES

THE bells were ringing for half-past twelve. The noonday sun shone warm upon the garden of Christmas Tree House, and on the bench under the bare branches of the ginckgo tree, where Susan and Holliday sat, earnestly discussing something.

“There’s Dick!” Holliday exclaimed. “Oh, Dick! can you stop a minute? We have a perfectly splendid idea and want to consult you.”

“Charmed, I’m sure, and flattered,” he responded, turning in at the gate.

“It is all Holliday’s,” Susan explained. “That ‘We’ is just for modesty.”

Dick placed his books on the ground before the girls and sat upon them in the attitude of humble listener.

“I thought of it in church yesterday,” Holliday began. “It is strange how you think of

things. You know the French motto Miss Grant gave us, Susan? '*Il vaut mieux mériter l'estime des hommes, que leur admiration.*'" Holliday liked to air her French on occasion.

Susan nodded.

"Well, as I walked to church with Aunt Nan, I thought of it, and wondered if any one was admiring me in my new suit; and it wasn't at all that I do not believe it is better to merit esteem than admiration." Holliday spoke with much gravity.

Susan laughed, and Dick said, "Pardon me if I don't catch on. I assure you of both my esteem and admiration."

"Thank you," said Holliday. "I am going on to explain how I happened to think of it. It was when Mr. Bright gave out a notice of the Flower Mission, that Christmas trees popped into my head. Susan and I were going to trim one for Susie Flynn at the hospital, and I thought, why not a lot of trees? At least one for each child there. On the hill back of Miss Arthur's there are ever so many little fir trees, and I am quite sure she would let us have them, for they are going to clear

that hillside next spring. Now couldn't some of you Spade boys help us?"

"We could go out on the country car, you know," Susan interposed, "and walk across."

"A sort of a winter picnic, don't you see?" Holliday added. "What do you think?"

"It would be dandy fun," Dick agreed. "Whom do you want?"

"Oh, Tom and Charlie and whoever you think. Phil, of course, and we'll ask Miss Grant to chaperon us."

"And if we could build a fire and make coffee or something," cried Susan, "it would be lovely fun."

"If it doesn't turn freezing cold," said Dick.

"And if our parents and guardians don't rake up a lot of objections," sighed Holliday. "I can hear them now saying, 'Nonsense.'"

The attitude of the parents and guardians towards the proposed expedition was very much as Holliday anticipated.

"Can't you have enough picnics in summer that you must go trailing to the country in midwinter, catching your deaths of cold? Lily has too delicate a throat for that sort of thing," Mrs. Boone said, stopping the carriage at sight

of Holliday and Susan. "Let the boys get the trees and you girls trim them. I am sure your mother doesn't approve, Susan."

She didn't, Susan had to own. She went back to the days when Susan had bronchitis regularly once a year. "And you have been so wonderfully well for three years. I don't want you to run any risks," Mrs. Maxwell said.

"Really, Holliday, it seems to me it would be much cheaper to buy the trees than to get ill just at Christmas time," Mrs. Lawrence remarked. "Of course it is for your father to decide."

Miss Grant saved the day, and proved herself a powerful ally. She was in the habit of taking long country walks, and knew the hillside in question. She also knew the owner of a two-room cabin, built for occasional summer use, just over the brow of the hill. She could get the loan of it for the day, she was confident. There they could have a fire and eat their lunch in comfort. She was an ardent believer in out-of-doors, and not in the least afraid of cold. Nothing but a storm ought to interfere, she thought.

This settled it. Mrs. Boone shrugged her

shoulders and asked, "Aren't young people funny?"

Mrs. Maxwell said, "Well, if that is your idea of a good time I suppose you can go, Susan, if you dress warmly."

An ecstatic group with Miss Grant in the midst stood at the gate of Christmas Tree House, discussing final arrangements one afternoon, when the Poet passed.

"Oh, Mr. Reynor, don't you want to go to our picnic?" called Holliday. "You can play with Miss Grant."

Miss Grant seconded the invitation with a cordial, "Come along, we'll be glad to have you."

Miss Reynor was quite overcome when she heard her brother was actually going with those ridiculous children to the country. "Why, Reggie, you will catch your death!" she exclaimed. "Why, you won't go to picnics in summer. What are you thinking of?"

The Poet wasn't thinking of anything except that he wanted to go. His sister's objections made him feel a little shamefaced. He was on the point of backing out, when he was called to the telephone.

“Mr. Reynor,” said Miss Grant’s voice, “may I count on you to bring matches? They are so apt to be forgotten. And a hatchet, too, if you will. Very well, we’ll see you to-morrow at ten.”

A hatchet and matches! The Poet felt an absurd thrill. For the moment he was a small boy again, doing some of the things he had never been allowed to do. He whistled gayly as he slipped a box of matches in his overcoat pocket, to be sure of them, and went in search of a hatchet. He was going if it killed him.

As it turned out it didn’t kill anybody. Not even a cold resulted, though Charlie declared that Grandma thought the expedition had undermined Lily’s constitution and would show its effect later.

The day was exactly right, frosty but bright. They went out on the country car, and the walk across the meadows and up the hill put everybody in a delightful glow. Even the Poet’s cheeks were rosy. Miss Grant managed her forces like a general. Each one had something to carry, and no one was burdened, and there in the heart of the country they might laugh

and sing and race, forgetful of tiresome, if necessary, conventions.

"I do like to do unusual things," Holliday exclaimed, dropping down on the step while the Poet, who had been entrusted with the key, unlocked the cabin door. "Miss Grant is a perfect angel to think of this."

"Hurrah for Miss Grant!" cried Tom, waving aloft some extra wraps Mrs. Boone had insisted upon sending.

A chorus of hurrahs arose. "And hurrah for the prime minister," added Charlie, meaning Mr. Reynor, who was so bent on being useful it was funny.

"Clearly your lungs are in good condition, if you can yell like this after climbing a hill," Miss Grant said, bringing up the rear with Lily and Nettie.

And now the cabin, so still and deserted a few moments ago, fairly overflowed with laughter and bustle, as the boys brought in wood and the girls piled the lunch boxes on the table. When the fire was roaring merrily and a volunteer committee consisting of Bes-sie and Nettie and Mr. Reynor had been in-

stalled to watch it and make ready for lunch, the rest scattered over the hill in search of trees.

It took time to find and cut a dozen or more of these, and nearly two hours passed before the woodmen and maids came gayly back to the cabin with their fragrant burdens.

“And people told us it would be just as much fun to buy them!” Susan exclaimed, bending to warm her hands at the fire.

“Aren’t you glad your grandmother let you come, Lil?” asked Holliday.

“Yes, indeed, and my tree is the prettiest of all. Phil cut it. I wish I had a ribbon or something to tie on it, so I’ll know it. I don’t want any one else to trim it,” answered Lily.

“Here’s a red string; won’t that do?” asked Bessie, who had been having a beautiful time putting the cabin in order and making ready for lunch, which was now set forth in appetizing array upon the rustic table. Miss Grant meanwhile presided over the coffee-pot, from which arose an intoxicating fragrance.

The fire roared and crackled, altogether in the spirit of the occasion; the winter sun shone in through the small-paned windows, each one

of which framed a different picture of brown hillside and bare branches against the sky.

"It is such fun to do things for yourself, as Holliday says," sighed Nettie, happily, emptying a bottle of olives into a wooden plate.

"I have been taught it is more so to do for others, so please pass the sandwiches before I die," begged Charlie, dropping down on the floor by the hearth.

"Charlie hurt his elbow, our only casualty thus far," Phil explained, transmitting the desired refreshment.

"I have plenty of Pond's Extract and bandages. You had better let me see it, Charlie," said Miss Grant.

He insisted that it was nothing, and as Tom said, it did not affect his appetite to any appreciable extent.

As honored chaperons, Miss Grant and the Poet sat in the window seat with a small table before them, and were waited upon. The boys and girls helped themselves and stood or sat around the fire as it pleased them.

"I believe I'd like to live in this sort of a place," remarked Dick. "How about you, Susan?" tossing her a big red apple.

Susan had found a three-legged stool somewhere, and what she called a lovely corner, being, Holliday pointed out, the greatest girl for corners.

"Oh, is Susan to decide it?" asked Nettie Tryon, mischievously.

"That reminds me," said Phil, "have you heard the latest on Tom? He spelled 'holiday' with two l's, and when Professor Johns pointed it out, he said he always spelled it that way."

There was much laughter over this, as Tom's admiration for Holliday was no secret. Susan was privately deeply obliged to Phil for diverting attention from her.

"It is something like preferring 'parlor' with 'u' in it, isn't it?" inquired the Poet, accepting a fourth sandwich. "Are you sure I am not eating more than my share?"

"Miss Arthur sent over a gallon of milk and a cake, so I think there will be nourishment enough for all," Miss Grant replied.

"But why is Holliday like a parlor?" asked Lily, opening her eyes.

"Is that a conundrum, Lil?" Charlie asked. "Because she is more ornamental than useful."

"Charlie! how ungallant! You should have

said both ornamental and useful," Miss Grant exclaimed.

"Never mind, I have to get even with Holiday. She said I was a villain."

"Why, Charlie Willard, I never did. However, if the cap fits—"

"What are you talking about?" Lily wanted to know.

"Say, Lily Ann, do you remember the time when Uncle Ben was ill and you heard Grandma say the doctors were working in the dark, and you wanted to know why they didn't light the gas?"

"I don't care," said Lily. "That was a long time ago."

"Did you know," continued Charlie, "that Dick is a poet? He has caught it from Mr. Reynor. Let me see, how does it go?"

'Lives of great men all remind us
That our task is very big,
If a name we'd leave behind us,
We must each learn how to dig.' "

And so the fun went on, with everybody talking and laughing at once, and long before anybody was ready the short afternoon gave notice that it would soon be gone.

On the walk back to the station the Poet discovered that Miss Grant had read some of his verses. The wintry sunset recalled a poem she particularly cared for. "That is the mood I like, courageous and hopeful," she said. "Now sometimes you are a bit despondent, and—well, almost hopeless."

The Poet, who was very sensitive, felt hurt for a minute.

"You don't mind my saying so, I hope?" she asked.

"Perhaps I do," he owned; then he laughed and asked if she remembered calling him a cry baby once?

She had not the slightest recollection of it, and was inclined to doubt his memory. "I didn't mean anything of the kind just now," she added. "It is only that I do love courage."

Down the lane came the laughing flock of girls and boys, who had been to Miss Arthur's to return the milk can with thanks. "Haven't we all had a glorious time!" she said. "I'd like to have a country school for city children one of these days."

CHAPTER XII

HOLIDAYS [SUSAN WRITES]

CHRISTMAS holidays are all pretty much alike, but this year there was more than usual going on. In the first place the week before Christmas we had our lovely winter picnic, which was more fun than anything we have ever done. Then we had a meeting in the school-room one evening to trim our trees for the children at the hospital. They were perfect beauties.

On Christmas Eve we carried them to the hospital after dark, and it was fun marching through the street, with the Christmas feeling in the air, and people turning to look at us and wonder what we were doing.

Dick and Holliday walked home with me afterward, and Holliday said, "Isn't it too bad that somebody is always ill? Doesn't it seem as if at Christmas everybody ought to be happy?"

For all she is so full of fun, she thinks of such things, sometimes. Dick said he supposed we ought not to worry about it, but just do what we could to help, and it was not long before Holliday cheered up.

There was only just time to dress for Lily's party, which is always on Christmas Eve, if possible. It is the event of the season, with the grandest tree and a dance afterwards. I wore my dotted muslin over blue and the beautiful moire sash Aunt Emily sent me.

"I never saw Bessie look so nice. She had on a new dress that her father bought for her. Her mother had Miss Tillie make it, and it was a complete surprise to her. It is old rose, and has a lovely lace collar that Mrs. Boone gave Bessie. You could see how pleased she was. Holliday and Bessie with Tom and Dick and Phil stopped for me, and Mother made the girls take off their coats so she could see how they looked. Holliday was all white, with a string of pearls around her throat and a spray of holly pinned on one shoulder. She always is lovelier than anybody else.

The first person I saw when we went downstairs was Aline Arthur, who is at home for

the holidays. She looked very well, I thought, and I heard somebody say to Mrs. Boone, "What a striking girl!"

She seemed glad to see us, and much more sociable than she used to be. She asked about the hospital, and said she still considered herself a member of our Thimble Circle, and was going to give us a donation from her Christmas money, and perhaps make some paper dolls for the bazaar.

Holliday said that would be splendid, and that Aline must take part in the Colonial Tea next week. Aline seemed pleased with the idea and said she would if she could get up a costume in time.

Clarice came in late. She is spending the holidays with a friend who lives near the school. Aline said, "Well, Clarice, I thought you'd be married by this time."

Clarice laughed and looked rather silly, and Charlie exclaimed, "Oh, Aline, you ought to see her beau," and with both hands he began to twist an imaginary mustache. Everybody knew what he meant, and at that very moment Mr. Lemoyne appeared at the door. Mrs. Boone likes him and asked him to come over

with Miss Cornelia, if he cared for a young people's party.

Clarice's cheeks were unusually pink, and it was very becoming to her, but Bessie whispered to me that it was rouge. I wonder if it was? I shouldn't think she would do a thing like that.

I didn't see any more of Clarice or of Mr. Lemoyne either, and forgot all about them, till Charlie said they were spooning in the library. I don't see why people want to be so silly.

Holliday gave an afternoon tea for both girls and boys; I had a spend-the-day luncheon for Aline and our old set, with Nettie of course, and Miss Arthur invited us all out there.

Aline asked us if we remembered about the lost bonds. Of course I couldn't forget them, for Joe and I found the receipt that proved Mr. Kennedy had not lost them. Then she told us about going to see Mrs. Carrol last summer. Aline says she wasn't crazy but had lost her memory, and once in a while for a few minutes she seemed to get it back. One day she spoke to Aline about the bonds. She said, "I am going to tell you where they are, and you must go and get them." Then her memory failed, and she forgot what she had been saying.

Aline told her nurse, Miss Avery, about the bonds, and asked her, if Mrs. Carrol ever mentioned them again, to try to find out something more. Miss Avery said she would, but Mrs. Carrol never spoke of them again. If the bonds were found now, Aline says they would go to the hospital.

She used to say she was going to be an artist, but now she wants to be a trained nurse. She says Miss Avery told her a great deal about it, and she thinks it a noble profession, and more useful than art.

The Colonial Tea, for the benefit of the hospital, was given at Christmas Tree House, because Miss Cornelia Reynor was ill. Holli-day said she was glad, for it was just that much more atmosphere of the right kind for Miss Margaret.

The house was perfectly beautiful in its Christmas decorations. The boys helped us, and Miss Cornelia sent Mr. Lemoyne over, as she couldn't do anything; and I must own, though I don't like him, that he has many good ideas.

The tables were placed in the east parlor and dining-room, and the rest of the house was all



"THE HOUSE WAS PERFECTLY BEAUTIFUL IN ITS
CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS."

open. Miss Carrie Mann had a candy table in the hall, and sold what she called colonial fudge. It is strange how pretty even plain people look with powdered hair. The girls were all lovely, everybody said. I wore a fichu that belonged to my great-great-grandmother. The rest of my costume was chintz.

The tea was a great success, for lots of people came. Some, I suppose, out of curiosity to see the house which has been so much talked about. Our hours were from five to nine, and about seven there came a lull. As Aline wanted to see the school-room, Holliday said this was a good time, so a number of us went down. Mr. Lemoyne, who was talking to Miss Carrie and heard us say we were going to the school-room, said he wanted to see it, too, and followed.

Aline said it used to be old Mr. Clifford's office, but I think she was disappointed in the room. We had told her how nice it was, but without any fire, and in the gaslight, it looked rather cheerless. Holliday showed her the chimney cupboard, and Mr. Lemoyne said he adored cupboards and that the mantel was very nice. Then suddenly he went to the

window, saying he thought the shutter was not securely fastened, and he put up the sash and worked with it for a few minutes. There had been several burglar scares in the neighborhood, and he said Parker ought to be more careful.

We went upstairs again and thought no more about the school-room till Aline had to go, about nine o'clock. Then she couldn't find her fan, which was an old-fashioned one belonging to her aunt. Holliday thought she might have left it in the school-room and sent Gertie for it.

Presently Gertie came back looking frightened and said the door was locked on the inside. Mr. Heywood, who was standing with us in the hall at the time, said, "Nonsense, it can't be," but he went down to investigate, and some of us followed. Sure enough, it was locked. He and Parker, the man, and Dick, who was with us, went around outside then, and found a shutter open, which was strange when Mr. Lemoyne had been so careful to fasten it. Dick climbed in the window and lighted the gas and unlocked the door, but the burglar, if it was one, had escaped.

Mr. Lemoyne, who was smoking on the Reynors' front porch, because Miss Cornelia can't bear the odor of tobacco, came over to ask what the trouble was. He said with so many strangers in the house it would have been easy enough for a thief to slip in.

Mr. Heywood asked why in the world would he lock himself in the school-room? And Mr. Lemoyne said he might have been hiding there till everybody was in bed, and to guard against surprise, had locked the door.

This sounded quite possible. Mr. Heywood said not to let Mrs. Lawrence know anything about it. Just then Dick picked up Holliday's purse from the piano where she had left it. She is rather careless about money. In it was a five-dollar gold piece. It lay there in plain sight; so the wonder was, if it was a thief, why he hadn't taken the purse.

"Do you think he is hiding somewhere in the house now?" Holliday asked, looking rather frightened.

"He would have to be a pretty smart burglar to lock a door behind him on the inside," Dick told her.

"No," said Mr. Lemoyne, "he must have escaped through the window."

"That man makes me tired," Dick whispered to me. "He knows so much."

Mr. Heywood was very much annoyed. He said he should never have allowed us to have the tea there; and that the responsibility of such a house was something he would never again assume. And he ordered us all upstairs, just as if it was our fault, Holliday said. At any rate I was glad no one could blame my imagination this time.

Aline had left her fan in the library after all. But for it, no one would have gone near the school-room again that night. What would have happened, I wonder?

We made nearly thirty dollars, which was doing very well, I think, besides the fun we had. The burglar was the only blot on the evening and we have agreed not to say anything about it, but Holliday says her father has reported it to the police.

The queerest thing is what Holliday discovered the next day when she went to get some papers out of the chimney cupboard. Everything on the bottom shelf had been

moved to the top one, and nobody in the house had done it, either. After this she is going to keep it locked, she says.

Dick says it seems as if somebody were trying to play rather foolish practical jokes.

CHAPTER XIII

THINGS CONTINUE TO HAPPEN

“ I SHOULD like to have a real villain and a secret drawer,” said Holliday. “ It would make our story so interesting.”

Susan laughed. “ It seems to me you nearly always get what you wish, but a real villain might be very disagreeable. Won’t the mysterious burglar do? ”

“ I have been thinking about the bonds ever since Aline was here,” Holliday continued, “ but when I mention them Papa laughs and says Mrs. Carrol made away with them long ago. If they were in Christmas Tree House, the Colonel would have found them. I reminded him how often things have been found under floors, but he said what is true, that we can’t be taking up floors that do not belong to us.”

The two girls were walking along North Street, having been to see the Brocade Lady

and take her a message from Miss Margaret's last letter. The Brocade Lady's son had been very ill, and as she was of course closely confined to the house, in consequence, she was greatly interested to hear all about their holiday doings, as well as other news. She was particularly interested in Miss Reynor's boarder, as she still called Mr. Lemoyne. Her son, she said, had heard his voice the day Miss Cornelia brought him to see the cottage, and insisted that he knew it, but in his memory it was not associated with the name Lemoyne.

"I wonder if we shall ever find out who B. A. is?" Holliday said. "Sometimes I think I'll tell him about it, just for fun, and yet I don't exactly like to."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't," Susan answered. "It was rather like reading another person's letter, though we did not mean to. He might be disagreeable."

"I had lots of fun teasing Clarice. I told her to ask him—that is, I dared her—who B. A. is," laughed Holliday.

When Susan ran upstairs at home a few minutes later, Sam, Silvy's husband, was bringing down a trunk from the attic. "Why,

Mother," she asked in surprise, "who is going away?"

Mrs. Maxwell had a paper and pencil in her hand, and a perplexed look on her face. "Put it there at the foot of the bed," she said to Sam. Then to Susan, "I have just had a letter from Cousin Alice telling me that Aunt Emily has broken her ankle. That means I must go and help take care of Grandma. Cousin Alice has to leave next week. Fortunately she can stay till Wednesday, so if I go on Monday I shall get there in time."

"Oh, Mother, I am so sorry about Aunt Emily! But what am I to do?"

"That is what is puzzling me. If it were not for that long business trip your father has to take, you could stay here with him and Silvy, but that is out of the question. Miss Cornelia Reynor would take you in, I am sure, if——"

"Oh, Mother! I couldn't, really and honestly I'd rather— I don't know what I would not rather do," Susan cried. "I couldn't stay in the house with that horrid man! Why can't I stay with Holliday? I am sure she will want me."

"Mrs. Lawrence has a house full of guests. It might not be convenient. You are silly about Mr. Lemoyne, Susan. You probably would not see him except at the table."

It was finally left to be decided when Father came in, and Susan went to put away her things. The sight of the little spade hanging beside the glass of her dressing-table reminded her that here was a hard thing she ought to meet bravely.

"Mother," she said, going back to Mrs. Maxwell's door, "if you think it is the only thing, I'll try to be willing to go to Miss Cornelia's."

But, after all, this martyrdom was not required of her, for in the midst of their planning Silvy brought in Mrs. Lawrence's card. Sam was washing the parlor windows, so the lady had to be shown into the dining-room. It was provoking that things always happened so, Mrs. Maxwell said. When they went down Mrs. Lawrence sat in Father's rather shabby chair, and Wynn by her side was investigating some lovely black fur, not unlike his own coat, which along with the out-

of-door freshness gave out a faint fragrance of violets.

Mrs. Lawrence had heard that Mrs. Maxwell was going to Philadelphia,—Mr. Heywood had met Mr. Maxwell,—and she had come in person to insist that Susan was to stay with them. There was plenty of room; the guests made no difference. Susan was no trouble. She loved to have her with Holliday, and so on. There was no resisting her.

As they went upstairs after she had gone, Mrs. Maxwell said, “I really must have Father’s chair covered in the spring, Susan. I did not realize it was so forlorn.” Somehow, in Mrs. Lawrence’s presence, you were always reminded of defects.

But what joy to be going to stay with Holliday! Half an hour later that young person came flying over in wild excitement, having just heard the news. “It really seems as if lovely things never would stop happening this winter,” she exclaimed.

The two or three days that intervened before Mrs. Maxwell’s departure were full of instructions to Susan not to forget this and to be certain to remember that. There seemed

to be a difference between remembering and not forgetting.

“Your dotted muslin with the pink and blue slips is here in the bottom drawer of my bureau, Susan, if you need it at any time. Silvy will be on the place and will do your laundry. Miss Tillie has promised to finish your rosebud challis next week, but I am afraid to trust her to match it with ribbon. I wish I had time to attend to it. You must do it yourself. Get samples and ask Mrs. Lawrence. It ought to be the deepest shade of pink, if you can find it.”

“Mother, I shan’t need that dress, I’m sure,” said Susan. “You know we won’t be having any more parties.”

“You will need it in the spring, and it will do no hurt to have it now. I want you to look nice, and some occasion may arise. You can consider it a birthday present.”

It was rather an ordeal to be deserted by both parents at once. Mr. Maxwell found he could accompany his wife as far as Washington, and so left a day or two earlier than he had intended. Susan insisted upon going to the station, but on the way she felt the lump

in her throat, which she had been able to ignore all morning, growing larger and larger. The sight of Holliday and Dick waiting on the platform was a great help. She had a horror of crying in public and this, added to the presence of her friends, bolstered up her self-control considerably. She was very silent, that was all.

And it was great fun to be staying at Christmas Tree House; to run home to speak to Silvy and pat Wynk, as a visitor; to see the storm doors closed and the blinds down; to go shopping with Lily in the carriage, with her sample of challis to match on her own responsibility, and then to Miss Tillie to be fitted.

Miss Tillie was becoming quite a dress-maker, having lately taken in an assistant. She didn't go out any longer to sew. While Susan's dress was being tried on, Gray Brother, Susie Flynn's cat, sat on the window sill and watched. Holliday amused herself writing a letter from him to Susie, while she waited. He described Susan's dress and how pretty she looked in it, but said he preferred her in blue, the color of her eyes. He told his little mistress how much he missed her and said

he would come to see her, but he had heard they didn't admit cats. At the end of this effusion Gray Brother was with difficulty induced to make his mark. Then his tormentors went to see Susie at the hospital.

Susie in her little white bed, with a heavy weight hanging at the foot of it, smiled and clapped her hands at the note. She was a happy soul, who enjoyed to the full every small pleasure that came her way. Although the Christmas trees which had been such a delight to the ward had by this time been taken away, the children were still talking about them and treasuring the gifts from them.

"Next Christmas maybe I'll be walking 'round," Susie said confidently.

It made you ashamed that you were ever cross or unhappy, Susan thought, as she went home with Holliday. Suppose instead of trying on a rosebud challis you had to lie in bed with a weight tied to you, for ever so long! But it was pleasant to think that you had a part in helping to make such patient little sufferers as Susie, straight and well.

CHAPTER XIV

THE KEY OF THE CUPBOARD

“SUSAN, I can’t think what I have done with the key of the chimney cupboard.” There was a note of anxiety in Holliday’s voice that aroused Susan from her dreamy absorption in the scene around her.

They sat in the front row of the dress circle. Swift-footed ushers were handling coupons and pushing down seats for the stream of people rapidly filling the theater. The orchestra was playing, and an atmosphere of happy anticipation pervaded the place.

It was all new to Susan, who had never been to the theater before. Mother did not approve of it for little girls. There was time enough, she had always said. Most of the other girls went frequently to Saturday matinées. Susan had listened eagerly to their descriptions of what they saw, and looked forward to the time when Mother would think she was old enough. Suddenly and unexpectedly that time had come.

“Of course you must see Henry Irving in the ‘Merchant of Venice,’” Mrs. Lawrence said, and it seemed to Susan’s joyful surprise that Mother thought so too, so here she was in the front row of the dress circle, part and parcel of the brilliant scene.

Holliday had the air of an old and experienced theater-goer. Susan felt a queer sort of timidity about bowing to persons she recognized, but Holliday nodded right and left, and even waved her hand to Miss Marion Seymour in one of the lower boxes. Marion was giving a box party, she explained, and added that you could not see half so well in one of those stage boxes.

“Why do they sit there, then?” Susan asked.

“Oh, it is fashionable and costs a lot,” Holliday answered. “There are Miss Carrie Mann and Miss Grant in the balcony.”

Susan asked if it was nice up there? Holliday didn’t know. It was cheaper. The dress circle was the best, that is, unless you wanted to be very near, but then you saw the make-up too plainly.

Susan felt a complacent satisfaction in

occupying one of the best seats. The best of everything seemed to be the motto at the Heywoods'. She gave herself up to the full enjoyment of the occasion, and was in no haste for the curtain to rise. Then came Holliday's sudden and somewhat worried announcement about the key.

Since the occasion of the Colonial Tea, Holliday had chosen to keep the cupboard locked and to carry the key about with her. It was always tumbling out of her work-bag or her pocketbook; sometimes she even pinned it on her dress. As it was a large brass key, it was not exactly ornamental; nor was there usually anything of much value in the cupboard, to make it necessary to keep it locked. It was merely one of her whims. She liked to carry keys.

"The trouble is I have locked up that art book there. The one with the Greek statuary in it, that I was showing to Miss Grant in class yesterday. If Papa discovers it he will scold dreadfully. He is so particular about the Colonel's books."

"I thought the bookcases were always locked," said Susan.

"They are, but I know where the keys are. I wanted so much to show Miss Grant that picture of the Venus of Milo, and neither Papa nor Aunt Nan was there to ask. I meant to take it back the minute class was over, and in the meantime I locked it in the cupboard. Then I forgot all about it. You see I took the greatest care of it."

"When did you miss the key? Just this minute?" Susan asked.

"The statuary on the curtain reminded me of Venus, and I remembered I had not put the book back; then I began to wonder where the key was. This morning when I was looking for my gold thimble I emptied my work-bag and my hand-bag on the bed, and though I wasn't thinking of it then, I am certain there wasn't any key, but I have a queer feeling that I saw it somewhere."

Here the lights went down suddenly and the curtain rose upon a street in Venice, and there was so much to think of and talk of between acts, that it was not until it fell finally upon the happy last scene, with lovers united and Antonio's ships come safe to land, that Holliday thought of her lost key again.

Susan put on her hat and coat in a kind of dream. Holliday laughed at her and told her to wake up. "Isn't Portia lovely? She is so clever. I like her better than Juliet; don't you?"

Susan liked her better than anybody just then. Nothing else seemed worth considering.

As they moved slowly with the crowd in the lobby, Holliday said, "I remember now. I dropped that key at Browinski's yesterday. I had it in my coat pocket. It fell on the floor when I took out my handkerchief. I remember picking it up and thinking that was not a good way to carry it, and that is all. Let me see. Mr. Lemoyne came in; Lily was buying chocolate drops and he asked her if she wasn't sweet enough? or something of the kind," she went on, feeling about as people do when they try to recall half-forgotten things.

Susan, returning with difficulty from Venice, remembered that Mr. Lemoyne had asked some silly question and that Holliday and Lily would stop to talk to him, while she waited impatiently at the door.

Holliday stopped the carriage at Browinski's

on the way home, and ran in to ask if any one had seen her key. Miss Carrie was the only one of the clerks who had. She remembered that Holliday had laid it on the counter while she fastened her glove, but that was all. She had not noticed it afterwards.

When with Gertie's help a thorough search had been made at home, to no avail, Holliday decided there was nothing for it but to confess. "For if Papa discovers the book is gone and asks about it, he will be ever so much crosser than if I tell him," she said.

She was such a plausible penitent with such a number of good reasons for her disobedience, and so distractingly pretty as she made her confession, that Mr. Heywood, who chanced to be in a very good humor, was disposed to treat it lightly. The book was safe, he supposed, and on Monday he would send for a locksmith. But she must understand that books were not to be taken from the library. To impress it upon her she might go without candy for a week.

Holliday joyfully accepted this severe punishment. It set her conscience quite at ease.

Marion and Dick Seymour came over to

dinner that evening, and the incident of the lost key was mentioned. Marion suggested that perhaps Mr. Lemoyne had seen it.

“ I saw Mr. Lemoyne this morning in a little hardware shop ever so far up town,” Dick said. “ I was riding in from the park and stopped to see if by chance I could get a certain kind of bolt. He asked what I was doing there, almost as if he thought I had no business to be there. There is something I don’t like about that man.”

“ You were surprised to see him; why should not he be surprised to see you?” asked his sister.

After this the conversation turned to “ The Merchant of Venice.” To Susan’s surprise Dick’s interest centered in Shylock and the way in which the character had been interpreted. To her Shylock was only to be tolerated as a necessary part of the play, in which Portia and Portia alone was star. Of course you were a little sorry for Shylock in the end, she owned. Holliday and Dick agreed that he got exactly what he deserved, but Susan said that didn’t keep you from feeling sorry.

On Monday morning one of the servants

found the lost key on the front steps. This was strange. Surely it could not have been there all the time. Yet things have a strange way of hiding in plain sight sometimes. But for what followed later on in the winter it would have remained a trifling incident.

CHAPTER XV

UPS AND DOWNS

It is strange how happy you can be one minute and how unhappy the next. Susan sat on the window sill and looked out into the garden, where the magnolia tree was shivering in the cold wind. That is, her eyes were turned in this direction, but the tears that filled them made everything a blur. She knew she was going to cry, and so had run away from Gertie's sharp glance. A great ocean of homesickness engulfed her.

They were lovely to her, but she didn't belong really. She was not the center of things as she was in her own home world. She did not put it just so, but this was really the trouble. Holliday had gone somewhere with her father, and Susan had planned to go to see Susie Flynn and then stop at home to see Silvy and Wynn, and get something she needed. As it was early she sat down a minute in the library to look at a new magazine. In

the drawing-room Mrs. Lawrence was talking to a caller. Now and then a word came to her.

Presently the voices sounded nearer. The caller was probably leaving and they had risen. "No," she heard Mrs. Lawrence say, "I shall not stay more than two weeks. I am unwilling to have Holliday's lessons interrupted any longer. No, I have not been in New Orleans for some years." They passed into the hall and Susan heard no more, but this was enough.

New Orleans. Two weeks. Then this was what Holliday had meant that morning when she came dancing into the school-room, announcing, "I know something I'm not going to tell!"

"Is it something nice?" Susan had asked.

"Nice is a feeble word, my child. It is great!"

"Why not tell, then?"

"Because it is a secret that I happened to discover, and I promised not to reveal it."

"Now Christmas is over I don't see what it can be that is so exciting," said Susan.

"There are other holidays besides Christmas, my child; but I shall not utter another word. I almost told," and Holliday had

danced out of the room with her hands over her mouth.

It was plain now. They were going to Mardi Gras. And what was to become of her? She knew, of course, that these kind friends would not turn her out into the cold world, but they might have told her. Holliday did not care, she was simply thinking of her own pleasure. Her unhappiness grew and grew as she dwelt upon it. Perhaps they would want her to go to Miss Reynor's. Well, she would not do it. She would go to Silvy, at home.

Susan stole upstairs, carefully avoiding Gertie, who was sewing in Holliday's room. She put on her things, and then crept quietly out of the house. The cold air was pleasant on her hot face, and the sight of the sky, gray though it was to-day, soothed her. Perhaps she was a goose to mind it so much.

She went in at the side gate and ran around to the kitchen door. Yes, Silvy was there, mixing something in a yellow bowl, singing to herself. Wynn with his paws tucked under him was dozing on the window sill beside a blooming geranium. Everything was in beautiful order; the stove freshly polished,

clean scalloped paper on the shelves, and Silvy singing her favorite song, the burden of which was:

“I wish I was in heaven settin’ down.”

“Oh, Silvy!” cried Susan.

“For the land’s sake!” said Silvy, breaking off in the middle of her wish. “You are just in time to cut out the cookies if you want to.”

“I’d love to. Are you glad to see me, Wynk?” Susan laid her cheek against his soft fur. “Yes, Silvy, I’m so glad you are making some.”

Wynk was as glad as a lazy, well-fed cat can be to see an old friend. He purred loudly and rubbed his head against her hand. The richness and ease of life in Christmas Tree House were very delightful, but this familiar, homelike kitchen was what Susan cared most for, just now.

“There’s an apron of your ma’s in the store-room,” Silvy said, going back to her beating and her song.

Somehow the sight of that apron brought tears again. Silvy, coming to look for her,

found her standing behind the door with her face buried in its folds. "Oh, I wish I could stay here with you, Silvy," she cried; and then in response to Silvy's solicitous questions, she sobbed out her grievance. "They are all going away and I don't know what is to become of me."

Silvy was highly indignant. Leave her child alone! She'd like to know what no account folks they were, to do a thing like that. "Never you mind, Susan, you come right straight home. I'll take care of you. I can make a pallet on the floor in your room. Nothin' shan't hurt you. I'd like to know what Mr. Frank and Miss Kitty would say!"

Silvy's vehemence had the effect of recalling Susan to reason.

"Of course they aren't going to turn me out or let me stay alone, Silvy. They will make some arrangement, but I'd rather be here."

It was much easier to get a wrong idea into Silvy's head, than to get it out. She clung to the impression that her child was being abused, and pouted out her lips and shook her head, muttering all sorts of threats, as she rolled out the cakes.

A quarter of an hour or so later, there was a knock at the door. Silvy had gone to her room for a minute, and Susan, who was opening the oven door, called, "Come in," without looking, as she took out one pan and slipped another in.

"I beg your pardon," said a familiar voice, and she turned, pan in hand, to face Dick Seymour.

Susan was silent from surprise and the consciousness of her big apron and red eyes. Dick begged her pardon again, explaining that he was looking for Sam and had no idea there was any one in the house but Silvy, or he would not have come to the back door. "What a nice kitchen," he added. "I didn't know you could cook."

Susan found her voice. "Come in and have a hot cookie," she said. "Silvy made them, I only cut them out. She'll be here in a minute, but I think Sam is at Miss Arthur's to-day."

Those fragrant cookies were not to be resisted, particularly on a cold afternoon. Dick accepted the invitation and partook of them, watching Susan as she turned the contents of

another pan out on a sieve. "Your apron is very becoming," he remarked.

Susan laughed, privately hoping he did not notice her eyes. It was a vain hope, however, for after a moment or so of silent enjoyment of his cookies, Dick said, "You won't mind my asking, will you, if there is anything wrong?"

Susan shook her head, feeling a silly desire to cry some more. "Nothing really," she replied.

Dick consumed another cookie. "You'd better own up. It will do you good. I'll keep it dark."

Susan had no mind to confess anything more than a little homesickness, but before she knew it Dick had the whole story.

"Why, Susan, you know they would not go away and leave you," he said.

"Of course I know Mrs. Lawrence will arrange it, but——"

"They ought to tell you their plans. I do think that. It isn't fair at all, not to. Don't you mind, Susan. It is bound to come out all right."

"But, Dick, please don't tell, ever. I am

afraid I am rather silly to care. I think I am a little homesick, anyway."

"Of course I shan't tell. It is very natural to be homesick. I know all about that. What I can't see is why they are making a secret of it."

"I ought to have remembered the birthday cake," Susan said, feeling more and more ashamed.

Dick asked what she meant, and she explained that once Holliday and Sophy Idelle had a secret from her and hurt her feelings, and it turned out, a week or so later, to be her birthday cake. "This seems different," she added with a sigh as she took off her apron, "but perhaps I don't understand."

"Susan, where have you been? Not at the hospital all this time?" Holliday cried, seizing upon her the minute she was inside the front door. "Aunt Nan says I may tell you the secret, and I can't wait! Oh, *Susan!*"

"Well, what is it?" Susan asked, conscious that she didn't sound exactly interested.

"We are going to New Orleans, to *New Orleans!* To Mardi Gras! Think of it, Susan! What fun we'll have! Why, you

don't look glad a bit. Why, Susan! aren't you?" Holliday stood still and gazed at her in astonished disappointment.

"Why, yes, I am glad you are going if you want to. Of course I'm glad for you, and I hope you will have a lovely time."

Light began to dawn upon Holliday. "Why, child! did you think I was going alone? Did you think that? The idea! Why, we are all going,—Papa and Aunt Nan, and you and I."

"Oh, but I couldn't, Holliday, truly. It would cost too much for one thing." Susan felt quite confident the state of the home treasury did not warrant any such demands on it, but she was glad Holliday wanted her; very glad.

"My dear goose, you are going. It is all settled. You can't help yourself. Papa will get you a pass, and we are to stay at Aunt Clara's. She says she will be delighted to have you. Your mother knows about it, Susan. Aunt Nan asked her before she left."

"Mother knew?" Susan repeated, joy breaking over her face. "Then that was why she wanted to have my pink challis finished!"

“I suppose so. And when do you think we are going? Next Wednesday.”

A changed Susan burst in upon Silvy next morning, which was Saturday. “Oh, Silvy, they are going to take me,” she cried. “So I’ll want you to press my white muslin, and have my clothes ready Tuesday morning, so we can pack. Can you?”

Silvy tossed her head and reckoned she could. She was mighty glad those folkses had come to their senses. Goin’ on a pleasure trip and leavin’ her child behind! It was quite useless for Susan to explain that they had meant all along to take her. Silvy continued to believe they had been in some way brought to their senses.

Holliday and Susan were objects of great envy among their friends. When Dick heard the news his eyes twinkled a little as they met Susan’s, but he didn’t say a word about yesterday afternoon. He agreed it would be great fun. He wished he were going, too.

“It is good of you not to tell,” Susan said to him when she had a chance. “I was a goose.”

“I suppose everybody is at times,” Dick

replied. "It would have been a poor return for the cookies, if I had."

They, it seemed, were not the only people going to Mardi Gras. Mr. Lemoyne said he rather expected to run down for a few days on business.

CHAPTER XVI

ENDING IN FAIRYLAND

AN important part of the pleasure of going South is leaving cold weather behind you; so the snow storm that came on Monday and was followed by the coldest spell of the season, added much to the already overflowing delight of the occasion.

Susan found it hard to attend to lessons with that alluring white world outside, and Holiday at her elbow, bursting out every second or two with something about the people and things they were soon to see. She had heard before this of Aunt Clara and Cousin Jack, and Corinne, but now these names took on a reality they had lacked hitherto. Aunt Clara was Mrs. Macfarland, Mr. Heywood's older sister. Jack and Corinne and Arthur were her children. Susan was assured she would love Cousin Jack; that Cousin Arthur was nice, but not like his brother. Corinne was a *débutante* this year.

"Please don't tell me any more now," Susan begged, "because really you know we ought to study. It isn't fair not to, when we are to have such a long vacation."

"You are right, my dear digger, I won't say another word," Holliday answered, returning to her history.

But not for long. "Susan, just look out at the snow and think, Friday we'll be where violets are blooming."

"Where violets bloom, sounds like poetry."

"I said 'are blooming,' they bloom here.

Here it is snowing,
There roses are blowing,

if you want poetry," Holliday went on.

"And soon we are going,"

Susan added; and then of course they stopped to laugh.

All their studying was interspersed with passages like these, and yet on the whole they did pretty well, Miss Grant said. She suggested that they might take some books with them. Why waste a long day on the train?

After hearing about roses and violets, Susan

was surprised when Mrs. Lawrence said she must take warm clothes as well as thin. "You never know what sort of weather to expect in New Orleans. You may need your furs."

Gertie did the packing, and neither Mrs. Lawrence nor Holliday seemed to feel any concern over it. At Susan's home, going away was more of an event. A steamer trunk into which went, among other things, a white dress apiece for the girls, was, for some reason not clear to Susan, sent ahead.

They had class as usual on Wednesday, and Mrs. Lawrence actually gave a luncheon. Susan, who was in a fever of excitement beneath a calm exterior, began to wonder if they would really get off. She hung over her tray, folding and refolding her ribbons, and opened her bag a dozen times to see that nothing was forgotten. Holliday left everything to Gertie, with perfect confidence. "I think you love to pat your things," she said, laughing, as Susan changed the position of her handkerchief case and closed the lid of the tray once more.

"Do you suppose they will come for the trunks in time?" Susan couldn't help asking.

"Why, of course. They always do. Aunt

Nan has just come up and is going to lie down for an hour. There is plenty of time."

In spite of fears to the contrary, the baggage man did come, and at last they were starting. Susan was reminded of the Christmas Eve when Holliday and she had gone to the station to see Miss Julia Anderson off. She felt quite grown up herself to-day with Dick's box of candy.

All "Our crowd," as Holliday called them, were at the station, and much merriment prevailed.

"Good-by, Susan, while you are away
Write me a letter, love,
Send me your photograph,"

sang Charlie.

"Give my love to old New Orleans." "Too bad you are going to miss the skating." "Do go in and pat Wynk for me, Bessie." "Good-by, good-by." And then the conductor called "All aboard—," and the long train began to roll smoothly out into the night. They were really on the way to New Orleans.

The journey, which to Mrs. Lawrence was something to be endured, was to her young companions a frolic from beginning to end.

Going to bed, getting up, eating breakfast in the dining car, these commonplace matters were lifted quite above the ordinary, for the reason that this was their first journey together. Holliday's tongue was scarcely still a minute and the books, stowed with such good intentions in their bags, lay untouched.

To Susan this was an adventure into the unknown, to Holliday it was a homecoming. Friends, relatives, and familiar scenes awaited her. Susan, as the day passed, began to realize that she was going into the midst of strangers and to feel her shyness growing. When the porter said they were an hour late, she was, if anything, relieved, while Holliday was all impatience.

"We shall be too late for the Momus parade. It is too bad!" she cried.

"I should think you might be able to do with Rex and Comus," Mrs. Lawrence answered.

"But I want Susan to see everything," said Holliday.

They had left the snow behind in the night and the sharp air had grown steadily milder. The country they were now passing through was low and marshy, the dreary, brown

stretches relieved here and there by patches of vivid green. As they left Bay St. Louis, and crossed the long bridge, which is built so low the train seems running through the water, the sun was setting round and red. Susan watched it, her face pressed against the pane, while Holliday moved restlessly about.

Even the last hour of a journey comes to an end sometime. Susan began to see twinkling street lights, and was conscious of the thrill of mystery as they steamed into the great, unknown city, under cover of the night. The baggage man appeared, and the porter with his whisk broom, and before the train stopped, in the midst of the whisking process, a tall young man, who reminded Susan of Joe, came down the aisle and was rapturously greeted by Holliday as Cousin Jack.

“And this is my dearest friend,” she announced, turning him about to face Susan after he had spoken to Mrs. Lawrence.

Cousin Jack laughed and said he was delighted to meet our dearest friend, giving Susan a cordial grip of the hand. Then he hurried them off the train, through the crowded station, to a carriage.

While the others talked of people and things she knew nothing about, Susan strained her eyes to see something of the streets they were passing through. The air that came in through the open window was cool and moist—like spring, she thought.

When after a rather long drive the carriage stopped, she had an impression of tall hedges and giant palms, and everywhere a faint, delicious fragrance which Holliday said was sweet olive.

“How long will it take them to dress?” Cousin Jack was heard asking Mrs. Lawrence.

“Are we going to the ball? Cousin Jack, you darling! Susan, what fun! It will take us about five minutes. That was why Aunt Nan had the trunk sent ahead. Oh, good! I hoped so. This will make up for missing the procession.” Holliday was quite beside herself with delight. Except that she had grown a foot taller, she had not changed much in two years, Jack said.

A large, fine-looking lady with white hair, and in evening dress, stood at the door to welcome them. She kissed Susan as if she had known her always, and said she was very glad

to have her, and Susan knew without being told that she was Aunt Clara.

“Now make haste,” said Cousin Jack. “We want to be there when the curtain goes up. I’ll allow you half an hour.”

Hand in hand Susan and Holliday followed a maid through the wide hall, up the shallow stairs, to a room on the second floor, where on the bed their white dresses and ribbons were laid out in readiness.

As they dressed Susan learned that it was the Momus ball they were going to. Her ideas on the subject were vague, but it was something delightful, of course. Holliday’s joy was contagious, and she tied her blue bows in a flutter of excitement.

“You are a dear little Puritan,” Aunt Clara said, coming in to see if they needed any more help, and kissing Susan’s cheek just as she did Holliday’s. “You will see Corinne at the ball,” she added. “She is one of the maids.”

Susan was not quite certain that she liked to be called a little Puritan, but certainly Aunt Clara was kind and cordial.

“Nansie and I will be along after a while,”

she told them. "Take good care of them, Jack."

And again they were rolling through the lighted streets, with that soft air in their faces. Was it possible that only last night they had said good-by to the girls and boys at home?

"We'll make it," Cousin Jack said, glancing at his watch as the carriage stopped before the French Opera House; and they did, though it remained a mystery how he managed to get them through the crowd so quickly.

"Aunt Clara has a box in the premier," Holliday explained on the way. "It is a good place to see everything,—just above the parquetry, you know."

Susan didn't know, and the open box into which they were conducted was unlike anything she had ever seen, and so was the brilliant theater with its lights and its throngs of people in evening dress, below them, around them, above them. Here was the alluring, splendid world of society, and she and Holliday were in the midst of it!

They had barely taken their seats and begun to breathe quietly once more, when the lights went down and the curtain rose on the

panorama of "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp," which carried them into the land of dreams. Scenes of truly Oriental splendor and mystery followed one another. Holliday, with her hand on Susan's chair, kept up a flow of explanation, between tableaux.

"There are the Queen and her maids in the right-hand box. Isn't she lovely? See that girl just behind her, with dark hair? That is Corinne. Down there in the parquet are the 'Call outs.' Do you see them?"

Susan, looking down obediently, saw only a number of pretty girls.

"They have been invited to take part in the maskers' dances, you know," Holliday went on.

"Do they unmask afterwards?" Susan wanted to know.

"On the stage? No, indeed! They go to their dressing-rooms and put on their evening clothes, and then are admitted at the front door like any one else," Jack explained. "They never tell."

"Aren't they sometimes found out?" Susan asked, smiling up at him as he stood behind her. "You remind me of my brother," she added.

"Thank you," he said. "Yes, sometimes they are found out, but not as often as you might think. In fact, very seldom."

The tableaux were over when Mrs. Lawrence and Mrs. Macfarland came in. Mrs. Lawrence wished to know how Susan was enjoying it. Jack was highly amused when she answered that she liked it even more than "The Merchant of Venice." "What do you suppose Henry Irving would say to that?" he asked.

"That is the only thing I ever saw in the theater," Susan explained shyly. "Of course this isn't the same."

"Now, don't tease her, Jack," said Aunt Clara.

By this time there began to be a great deal of visiting from box to box. Many old friends came in to greet Mrs. Lawrence and Holliday. Susan was left undisturbed for the most part, to enjoy the dances that followed the coronation of the Queen.

Then Aunt Nan said they had had quite enough excitement for one evening, and under the escort again of Cousin Jack they left the glittering scene.

A very pink-cheeked, bright-eyed girl smiled back at Susan as she untied her blue ribbons before the mirror.

"Susan, don't you love it?" demanded Holliday.

Susan had never imagined anything so wonderful and beautiful.

"And there are Rex and Comus yet to see," Holliday said, shaking her shining hair around her shoulders. "And Aunt Theo and the lions," she added, laughing.

Aunt Theo lived in French town. She was Holliday's great aunt on her mother's side, and was related by marriage on her father's.

"I should think you would hate not to live here," Susan remarked feelingly, "but I am glad you don't."

"Oh, well, it isn't always Carnival," Holliday answered.

CHAPTER XVII

AUNT THEO AND THE LIONS

MADAME THEO lived on Royal Street in a queer old house which was entered by way of a massive gate and a paved alley that led into a courtyard, beautiful with growing plants of countless variety. In pots and tubs and tall water jars they overflowed the galleries and surrounded the stone fountain. Susan, who felt a little alarmed at the prospect of Madame Theo, wished she might be allowed to stay here beside the fountain; but she did not mention it, and followed meekly in the wake of Holliday and Mrs. Lawrence, up the grand staircase to the living rooms on the second floor.

Susan had gone to bed under the spell of fairyland, and daylight had not altogether dispelled it. After breakfast with Aunt Clara, who was the only member of the family visible, she and Holliday wandered around the garden in the summery sunshine. The

Macfarlands lived on St. Charles Avenue, in a house not unlike the houses she was familiar with at home, but the garden with its giant palms and magnolias, its roses in bud, its violets in bloom, was different. It was strange to think that at this moment the Colonel's garden was covered with snow, and its magnolias, little sisters to these great trees, were sighing unhappily in the cold wind.

On the way to Madame's the *differentness*, as Susan expressed it, increased. The wide gutters, the gate bells, the queer cisterns all above ground, the strange names borne by familiar things, all amused her. The porches and piazzas in New Orleans were galleries, the sidewalks were banquets, the wardrobes, armoires.

At the head of the stairs, a tall, dark young woman, who introduced herself as Miss Avery, Madame's companion, met them and took them into the drawing-room, where the old lady awaited them.

She sat in a great armchair with cushions about her, a little shrunken person, yet very impressive. An elaborate headdress of lace fell over her shoulders, and although her great

dark eyes were dim and her skin like old ivory, her features were straight and fine, and it was easy to believe she had in her youth been beautiful.

Susan had every opportunity to observe her, for she was left in the background for the time. Madame had no thought for any one but Holliday, her Evelyn's child. She made her kneel on a footstool before her, and with her hands on the young girl's shoulders gazed intently into her face.

"Just eighteen years ago your mother was queen of the Carnival, and to me it seems day before yesterday; but to you it is a long, long time, I suppose."

"Before I was born always seems long ago," Holliday replied. "Do I look like Mamma, Aunt Theo?"

The old lady shook her head. "Perhaps a little. Evelyn was more petite. You are tall like the Heywoods."

"But her eyes and hair are Evelyn's, Aunt Theo," Mrs. Lawrence said.

"She is a very handsome girl, as girls go nowadays," Aunt Theo owned, patting Holliday's cheek with a tiny, withered hand.

Susan from her corner on the high-backed sofa felt indignant. She was certain no one could ever have been more beautiful than Holliday. Madame Theo was losing her eyesight, this explained it. Susan did not know about the glamor that lies over the past for those who are old.

A little behind Madame, Miss Avery sat, doing embroidery work. She had been the subject of some discussion at the lunch table. Mrs. Macfarland said Aunt Theo was quite infatuated, and she could not understand it, for Miss Avery was not good-looking and seemed to her to have extremely brusque manners. She had come highly recommended, she went on, in reply to a question from Mrs. Lawrence, having been some years in an Eastern sanitarium, and more recently companion to some elderly person who had died. Susan thought she looked cross. Avery was not an uncommon name, but it seemed connected in her mind with something that had happened lately, she could not think what.

And now Holliday rose from her footstool and beckoned to her. "Aunt Theo, I have brought my dearest friend to see you," she

said, and Susan had to take her place on the ottoman and submit to that intent gaze, beneath which she grew very pink.

"She is a cool-blooded little Northerner, I see," the old lady remarked with a mischievous smile. "Susan is a good name. It suits you. It means a lily."

"She is a kind of lily-of-the-valley, Aunt Theo," put in Holliday; "but she is only half Northern."

"You once met some of the Norrises of Philadelphia, Aunt Theo," Mrs. Lawrence said. "Susan's grandfather was a son of Judge Abel Norris."

"Is that so? Yes, I knew Abel Norris. A wretched Yankee he was, but amusing. It is good stock. Does Holliday impose upon you, my dear?"

"Oh, no," Susan replied earnestly, "that is, not often. She doesn't mean to." At which the old lady laughed heartily.

"We must leave you now, Aunt Theo," Mrs. Lawrence said, rising. "Holliday wishes to show her friend some of the lions, as she calls them. We are going over to Jackson Square, and the cathedral."

Aunt Theo, however, wished to talk with Nannette, and would have her way. "Beatrice can take the girls," she said, "and you can stay with me. You don't want to see Jackson Square. It will do you good, Beatrice, to get some air."

The arrangement did not suit any one particularly except Madame. Miss Avery, Susan thought, looked positively sulky.

"She isn't very polite," Holliday whispered. "Still, we need not mind her. Aunt Theo makes you do what she wishes, whether or no."

"I suppose that is where you get it," Susan said, laughing.

However, when she rejoined them with her hat on, Miss Avery appeared to have thought better of it and decided to look pleasant. She had an errand for Madame that took them first to Orleans Alley, a picturesque court, with the cathedral and bishop's garden on one side and quaint, many-galleried houses on the other.

The names of the streets as they walked along amused and interested Susan. It was like French History, she thought,—St. Anne, St. Philip, Chartres, Iberville.

"But here's some American history for you," Holliday remarked, when they stood before General Jackson's statue, above which floated the stars and stripes. "Aunt Theo was a little girl at the time of the battle of New Orleans, but she remembers it, and things she heard her father tell about it."

"You should ask Madame to tell your friend about the visit of Lafayette in 1825, when she was a young lady," suggested Miss Avery. She added that Jackson Square once had a French name, "Place d'Armes."

After Jackson Square and the cathedral, they visited some bird stores, and Holliday and Susan were delighted to find among the many brilliant, theatrical-looking fowls a gray African parrot with scarlet tail feathers, almost the counterpart of old Look-in-a-book, of honored memory.

When they passed the Haunted House, haunted for more than half a century by its grewsome story of tortured and murdered slaves, Holliday said, "We live in a haunted house, don't we, Susan?"

Miss Avery inquired where they lived, and for some reason seemed surprised at the reply.

It might have been at the cheerful name of Christmas Tree House. Holliday went on to explain this as they walked back to Aunt Theo's, but Miss Avery made no comment upon it and asked no more questions, appearing, indeed, rather absent-minded.

"How has the little Puritan enjoyed herself to-day?" Cousin Jack wished to know, taking a seat beside Susan in the drawing-room before dinner.

"I never had such a lovely time," she told him, adding demurely that she seemed to have a great many nicknames.

Jack asked what the others were, and professed himself charmed with Susan Hermione. Its origin was so interesting, he said; but "Your Shyness" was best of all.

Corinne, whom Susan had not seen before, came in from an afternoon tea, just here. She was a pretty girl, full of life and gayety, and quite as cordial to Holliday's friend as the rest of the family. She had a great deal to tell about last night's ball, and brought out her favors and invitations for the admiration of the family. Holliday and Susan hung about her with the most flattering interest.

“ Susan, you do like it? ” Holliday asked, for at least the tenth time, as they were getting ready for bed.

“ Why, it is all beautiful and like fairy-land,” Susan replied, laughing. “ And your relations are the kindest people I ever met, though I was afraid of Aunt Theo.”

CHAPTER XVIII

REX AND COMUS

“HERE in New Orleans grown people play like children,” Susan wrote to her mother. “It is the loveliest fun, partly I suppose because they have so much money and can have such wonderful playthings. I used to think it was all Mardi Gras, but that is only the end of the Carnival which begins in January.

“Perhaps you will think it sounds foolish, but really, Mother, you can’t help feeling that Rex is a real king, coming from some far-away country. Mr. Jack took us down to see him land. He came up the river in his royal yacht, with his court, and it was very exciting, with bands playing and cannons firing. After that we went to the City Hall and saw the Mayor deliver the keys of the city.

“Everywhere, but particularly on Canal Street, you see miles and miles of decorations, in Rex’s colors, green, purple and yellow bunting, with flags and banners.

“We spent nearly all day going to meet him, and then to see the keys delivered, and we had lunch down town in a queer French place. Such fun! We were so tired when we got home, Mrs. Macfarland said we were to see the Rex parade next day with her and not go tearing around the streets with Jack. I couldn't help feeling a little sorry, for he is so full of fun. Arthur, Mrs. Macfarland's other son, is nice too, but he is engaged to be married, and hasn't any time to waste on us. Holliday said I need not mind, for we were to see the Comus parade with Jack, at night, and that it was just as well to do the proper thing in the morning.

“I never saw anything like the streets when we started out Tuesday morning. Children in cambric costumes with bells, and wearing funny masks, birds and beasts of all sorts, strolling musicians, and the funniest red imps with long tails which they carried carefully over their arms. It made a fascinating picture. We went with Mrs. Macfarland and Mrs. Lawrence to the gallery of the Pickwick Club. I forgot to say the weather was perfect. On Saturday it rained and turned rather cold,

but was warm again in time for Mardi Gras.

“It was a privilege to have seats in that gallery, for it was where the Queen sat, and we not only had a good view of her but were introduced to her afterwards.

“I think I was a little disappointed because she didn’t wear her royal robes and a crown. People here seem so fond of dressing up, I supposed she would. She had on a big hat covered with light blue plumes, and a feathery blue thing around her neck, and looked very pretty, only not especially like a queen.

“I have a lot of pictures of the parade for you, so I will not take time to describe it. The subject of it was ‘The Language of Color.’ It was an exciting moment when Rex appeared. He hadn’t any mask and looked really like a splendid king. His chariot stopped before our gallery, and he greeted the Queen and sent up a great bouquet of violets, daffodils and ferns.

“After it was over I was introduced to a great many persons. There are so many who used to know Holliday’s mother and are interested in her. Everybody is very kind. They

treat me as if I were an old friend, too. I was never so much kissed in my life. I am trying, as Miss Grant says, to play my part and not just look on.

“ We stayed at home in the afternoon and Corinne showed us her dress for the Comus ball; then at night we went with Jack to see Comus from the street. The illuminations made the city even more beautiful than by day, and the flaming torches and colored lights added a great deal to the effect of the parade. The floats represented ‘ Legends of Japan ’ or something of that sort, and you can imagine how queer and picturesque they were.

“ Holliday had an adventure. We were standing near the curbstone watching the parade, when one of the floats came to a halt before us. One of the maskers who, we decided, must be a prince or something royal because of his gorgeous robes and many jewels, waved his hand to us. Attached to a chain around his neck was a small fan, which he used constantly, and just as they were moving on again he pointed to Holliday, and taking off the chain threw it to her. Jack caught it and gave it to her, and quick as thought Holliday

unpinned her carnival badge and tossed it to him. In his effort to catch it he came near falling off the float. He got it, however, and the last we saw of him he was pinning it over his heart. The fan and chain are beautiful. Corinne says they are handsomer than any of her favors. Of course, Holliday is very much pleased. She says she will probably never know who the prince is.

“Our adventure did not end here, for when we had made a short cut and overtaken the parade in another street, we recognized the same float. While we were looking there was a sudden blaze which for a minute we thought was part of the program. Then we realized that the float was on fire. It had caught from one of the red light torches. It was terribly exciting! The maskers had to jump for their lives, but the fire was put out very quickly and they were taken away in a carriage, and the smoldering remains hauled out of sight.

“It is just a week to-day since we left home, but I have seen so many new and strange things it seems much longer.

“I hope both Grandma and Aunt Emily

are better. Give them ever so much love.
With heaps for yourself,

“Your devoted daughter,

“SUSAN NORRIS MAXWELL.”

The adventure on Mardi Gras night had, as it turned out, a sequel. To be made the recipient of such a favor was an honor to which no girl could be indifferent. Holliday was frankly delighted, and regarded her fan and chain as among her greatest treasures, and spent many moments wondering over the identity of the prince, as she and Susan called him.

The Macfarlands' was a favorite gathering place for young people. The friends of Corinne and Jack made a merry party in the drawing-room almost every evening. Her Shyness was more than willing on these occasions to stay in the background and watch the fun till it was time to go upstairs; but Holliday, in the midst of it, resented being sent to bed like a baby.

Mrs. Lawrence was firm, however. She was not going to take two tired-out girls back to Miss Grant.

Among the callers one evening was a young Englishman, Brian Fortesque, who had been pointed out to Susan on several occasions and about whom she had heard a good deal of talk. His mother had been a schoolmate of Aunt Clara's, but had married an Englishman and lived abroad for many years. She was now a widow and had returned to her old home to spend a year with her mother, who was in feeble health. During this time her son had been in New Orleans constantly, and by his pleasant manners and frank interest in the peculiar customs of this part of the world had made himself a social favorite. The well-known fact that he might at some time succeed to the title and estates of his uncle, the Earl of Darrow, no doubt whetted the interest Society took in him.

It happened that Mr. Heywood had arrived that evening to spend a few days with his sister and take his family home, and Holiday to surprise him had put on one of her cousin's frocks and arranged her hair high on her head. The little girl was transformed at one stroke into the woman, and it was impossible not to exclaim over her beauty. Her

own enjoyment of thus dressing up made her all the lovelier.

Mrs. Lawrence shook her head, and after the first shouts of surprise and admiration were over, would have sent her to put on her usual dress; but Mr. Heywood, looking fondly at his charming daughter, said, "Let her alone for to-night, Nan. To-morrow she will be my little girl again."

Holliday enjoyed to the full the evening and her little triumph. Susan, sitting beside Mrs. Macfarland across the room, watched her exhibiting her fan and chain to Brian Fortesque, as they stood together by the piano, with a wistful feeling of being suddenly left behind by her friend.

Mr. Fortesque's right hand was bandaged. Susan had heard him explaining lightly that he had met with an accident, and it was this, together with a merry little scene which followed Jack's mischievous reminder to Holliday that half-past nine, the inexorable hour, had struck, that revealed a secret to her observing eyes. Brian begging for a flower and Holliday gayly presenting one of the roses she wore at her belt,—that was all, but the gesture

he made as he fastened it on his coat was that of the prince in the Comus parade, Susan was sure. Besides, there was a rumor abroad, she knew, that one of the maskers was burned. She confided her guess to Holliday as they went upstairs after the good-nights.

"Why, Susan," cried Holliday, "I can't believe it," but she fell into a profound reverie as she sat before the glass taking down her hair.

"Arthur said one of the maskers was burned, I know," she remarked. "It is very clever of you to guess it, Susan; perhaps you are right."

"I hope you won't go and fall in love with him," Susan said discontentedly.

"Why, Susan Maxwell, I hope I am not so silly! By the way, I wonder if Mr. Lemoyne ever came?"

"What made you think of him?" asked Susan.

"Why, falling in love suggested Clarice, I suppose."

"Well, I am sure I don't care whether he came or not," said Susan.

CHAPTER XIX

“YOURS, B. A.”

SUSAN had not the least idea of being an eavesdropper when she slipped out on the gallery at Madame Theo's that morning.

They had been invited to lunch, but when they arrived, Madame, who had had a bad night, was not yet dressed. Mrs. Lawrence said that if Susan did not mind waiting alone in the drawing-room for a few minutes she and Holliday would make a call in the neighborhood, upon an old friend.

Susan did not mind. She would write to Bessie. She had a pencil in her bag and a new pad she had bought that morning. After they were gone, however, she found herself rather oppressed by the stillness and dimness. The high French windows were open upon the gallery, most inviting with its flowers and sunlight and its view of the quaint old fountain; so she stole out and established herself in a low chair near the railing.

As she sat there, she thought of what the

Poet had once said about atmosphere. She was beginning to understand it. In a place like this, when all was still, something seemed to speak. Stories, real stories, floated around you. You felt that if you were only quiet enough, and waited, you must at length hear and understand.

After dreaming over this for a while, she remembered her letter and picked up her pencil. She began with their visit to St. Roch's Chapel the day before. She liked to write letters, and was soon so absorbed in her description of the shrine as to be unconscious of her surroundings.

Some minutes had passed when she became dimly aware of a low-toned conversation carried on somewhere near. She went on with her letter, paying no attention.

"Then I'd better vamoise at once. It is a queer coincidence, but I much prefer not being seen. It might complicate matters." It was a man's voice and somehow familiar, but Susan did not stop to think of it.

"Once when St. Roch lay in the forest ill with the plague, a good dog came to him and fed him," she wrote.

"I have taken care not to mention my last case by name, for fear it might lead—you understand? But I did not dream—" It was a woman's voice this time, and it fell into so low a tone the rest of her sentence was lost.

"So over the altar they have put a statue of the saint with the dog by his side," Susan continued.

"Don't be impatient." It was the man's voice. "If I remember, you said yourself it would be worth while if it took a year, and it is far from that yet. Unless you are mistaken in your facts, 'Southern Homes' will net us a neat sum yet."

"My facts are all right. She was as sane as I am."

"It would be worth while!" "Southern homes!" Susan was wide awake now. It was Mr. Lemoyne's voice, she knew, and Miss Avery's. She could not see them for the vines, but they must be immediately below her in the court.

"I hold the key to the situation, then, literally. Ta, ta! and thanks for the chink." Mr. Lemoyne's disagreeable laugh ascended.

“Good-by, and success to ‘Southern Homes,’ ” responded Miss Avery.

Susan caught sight of Mr. Lemoyne’s back as he crossed the courtyard and disappeared, lighting a cigarette as he went. Now here was something very queer. That he should know Miss Avery! What did it mean? A guilty feeling of having heard something not meant for her ears took Susan back to the drawing-room, where Miss Avery had left her. Her mind was a jumble of St. Roch and this very queer conversation.

Holliday’s voice on the stairs interrupted her effort to put her thoughts in order, and almost immediately, assisted by Miss Avery, Madame Theo entered.

The old lady appeared to have quite recovered from her indisposition, and laid herself out to be entertaining to her young guests, relating stories of old times in New Orleans, and talking of her own youth and that of Holliday’s mother. She was proud of her Creole blood and had never been reconciled to her husband’s very Scotch name, Carmichael. She liked to be called Madame Theo.

She gave Holliday a miniature of her

mother as a child of six, set in pearls, very valuable and beautiful. "It is time you began to be called by her name," she said.

Susan knew Holliday had her mother's name, but it seemed quite impossible ever to call her anything but Holliday. Though Evelyn was a beautiful name, it did not suit her so well, she thought.

The queer conversation she had overheard never quite left her thoughts, and the first moment she had Holliday to herself, she burst out with it.

Her friend was as surprised and interested as she could desire. "Why, Susan, it is the strangest thing! Talking so mysteriously to Miss Avery, and— Do you suppose it was us he didn't want to see?" she asked ungrammatically.

"It sounded like it. Perhaps he was afraid we might tell Clarice."

"I don't see why he should care about that."

"Well, neither do I, and he may not have meant us at all," said Susan.

"Yes, it is very easy to jump to wrong conclusions. But isn't it funny that we should have discovered at last what was worth while?

And, Susan, do you realize that ‘Yours, B. A.’ must be Miss Avery?”

“There is another strange thing,” added Susan, “she must have given him some money. He said ‘Thanks for the chink.’ Besides, I forgot to tell you, Miss Avery said somebody was as sane as she was, and Mr. Lemoyne said then he had the key to the situation.”

“I think I’ll tell Papa about it,” Holliday decided.

They were on their way home before the opportunity for this presented itself, there were so many last things to be done and said. Susan felt as if she had known these cordial, warm-hearted people always, instead of less than two weeks.

“Come back in two or three years, and we will give you the grandest time you ever dreamed of,” said Cousin Jack.

“We will, won’t we, Susan? And we’ll go to all the balls and the opera, and never go to bed, if we don’t wish to,” cried Holliday, whose grievance still rankled.

Susan laughed and said she had already had the grandest time she ever dreamed of, but she’d love to.

And so, followed by good wishes and loaded with fruit and flowers, they said good-by to New Orleans.

When it came to the story about Mr. Lemoyne, Mr. Heywood was not greatly impressed. He agreed it was a queer coincidence that they should have found the scraps of that letter, and that later Susan should hear a conversation relating to it, but saw nothing more in it than this. Thus for the time the matter was dismissed.

CHAPTER XX

THE EVERYDAY WORLD

“GET your things unpacked as quickly as possible, dear. Sam will be in presently to carry the trunks up to the attic.”

Susan, who had been sitting on the edge of her trunk talking as fast as her tongue could go, dropped on her knees and began to lift out its contents. It was both strange and pleasant to be at home once more, in the familiar everyday atmosphere. In the next room her mother, who had arrived a few hours before her, was busy at the same task. Outside the rain fell in a steady downpour from an uncompromising sky. It was just as well, Mrs. Maxwell said, for they were not so apt to be interrupted.

Indoors, too, was all the more attractive in contrast with the outside gloom. Silvy had the house in the most spick and span order, with fresh curtains and covers everywhere. The plants, some of which had been visiting at the neighbors', and others cared for in the kitchen,

were back in their place in the bay window of the dining-room. The brass coal-bucket and fire-irons shone like the sun; the fruit basket on the sideboard was full of apples and oranges; the new *Harper's*, still in its cover, lay on the table; favorite friends smiled a welcome from behind the doors of the bookcase. Susan, over her unpacking, thought of all this pleasantness downstairs waiting to be enjoyed, besides so much to tell and hear.

"New Orleans is perfectly lovely, Mother, but after all home is rather nice," she walked to the door to remark.

"I am glad to have you say so, dearie," Mrs. Maxwell replied. "You have had so much pleasure of late, I had begun to fear you might become dependent upon excitement. To lose the power to enjoy quiet, everyday life is one of the saddest things that can happen, it seems to me. I hardly think your Shyness is in very great danger, however," she added, smiling.

Wynkyns, who was overjoyed at the return of his family, and had been following Susan up and down, back and forth, jumped into a chair near by, and rubbed his head ingratiatingly against her elbow. Susan sat down and

began to pet him. "I don't think I am, either," she said. "But I'm not so afraid of people as I used to be. Nobody could be afraid of Holliday's friends, though."

"Did any one think your pink dress pretty?" asked her mother. "You certainly are growing, Susan. That dress you are wearing is short."

"I know it is, Mother. Can't the hem be let down?"

"I hope so. Where is your embroidered guimpe? Hannah is coming this afternoon for the clothes. Isn't that Sam? Have you everything out of your trunk?"

"I shall have in a minute," and Susan ran back to her work.

When the trunks had been carried off, she stood a little disconsolately, surveying the piles of clothing to be put away. At Holliday's it was different. Gertie did all her unpacking. She had no responsibility. It was on the tip of Susan's tongue to ask if she might not leave the rest of her work till after lunch, but she thought better of it. Mother would say she was spoiled, or would perhaps do it herself. So she decided to get things under cover, at any

rate. She opened the wardrobe doors and all the drawers in the bureau, and went about, dropping this garment here, and that there, in very rapid fashion.

“Why, how quickly you are through,” Mrs. Maxwell said from the door, fifteen minutes later. “And now, Susan,” she added, “as you will be very busy after to-day making up for lost time in your lessons, if I were you I’d sit down and write to Mrs. Macfarland at once.”

“Oh, Mother! do I have to?—now?” It was really too much, when she wanted to go down and stir the dining-room fire, and then, with Wynk and a book and some apples, enjoy herself.

“Tell her how much I thank her for all the pleasure she gave you. You need not write more than a few lines, but the sooner you do it the more gracious it will be. A prompt note is after all a small return for such kindness.” Mother had a dreadfully convincing way of putting things. Susan went wearily to her desk. The lunch bell rang before she had finished.

She had begun to carry out her postponed

program, and curled up on the sofa was cutting the pages of the new magazine, wondering meanwhile what Holliday was doing, when Bessie came in.

"I left my waterproof and rubbers in the kitchen," she explained, after greeting Susan in what Joe used to call the long-lost-brother fashion. "It's pouring like everything. I am so glad you have come home. It has been rather stupid with only Lily. Nettie has chicken-pox. I saw Holliday a minute. I suppose you had a grand time. Mrs. Boone says maybe next year she'll take Lily and me."

"I hope she will, Bessie," and Susan began forthwith to enlarge upon the pleasures in store. Everybody enjoys giving points to prospective travelers, out of a larger experience.

Bessie listened with flattering interest, accepting an apple the while, but it transpired later on that she too had things to tell. There had been goings-on at Mrs. Knight's school, among the boarders. The boarding pupils were limited to twenty, and were supposed to be under the strictest guardianship, but stories were floating about of all sorts of escapades

indulged in by these same young ladies. A spirit of daring and bravado pervaded the school. Girls had even stolen forth in the night, it was said, to talk to boys through the hedge. It was suspected that notes circulated between them and the High School boys, but the authorities had been puzzled to detect the method of conducting the correspondence.

“And then, what do you think?” cried Bessie. “Miss Kemp found a note in a bag of chocolate drops.”

This was exciting indeed! “Whose chocolates were they?” Susan asked.

“Alice Carrington’s. You know the girls are allowed to go shopping if their marks are good, two of them each week, with a teacher. They are allowed candy once a week too, just so much, and the other girls always give them commissions. Some of the boys have been leaving notes with Miss Carry at Browinski’s, and she would slip them in with the candy. For some reason Alice had not noticed this one. It was on thin paper twisted into a little wad. Miss Kemp is pretty sharp, though, and she examined it and then showed it to Mrs. Knight. It was addressed to Rena Clark.

Mrs. Knight was furious and pitched into Alice and Rena both. They both vowed they didn't know a thing about it, and they didn't, —about that particular note."

"Wasn't the note signed?" Susan asked.

"In some sort of hieroglyphics; the boys all do that. Of course the girls would not tell on them."

At this point a tap on the window pane made them both jump.

"It is Charlie," exclaimed Susan, going to the window, and sure enough there stood that merry youth, defying the rain in his rubber coat and cap. "Go around to the side door and I'll let you in," she called.

"Can Dick come in, too?" Charlie asked as she opened it. "I found him at the gate, too wet to go to the front door and too modest to go to the back."

"It isn't the first time I have been to the back door, is it, Susan?" said Dick. "Only the last time it was the kitchen door."

"Then I'm jealous. She never let me in at the kitchen. Mercy—, Susan, we're making an awful puddle on this floor!"

"It is linoleum, it won't do any harm, but

"I'm very glad to see you," Susan assured them, laughing, as they slipped off their raincoats.

"Bless me! If here isn't Bess," Charlie said as they entered the dining-room. "Well, this settles it. There's nothing left for me to tell. How long has she been here?" He sank upon the hearth rug beside Wynkyns, who eyed him with suspicion and prepared for flight. "Don't go, Wynkie. I am always kind to little pussy."

"I'll be there in a minute," Susan called from the pantry. "I want you to have some of our real New Orleans pralines."

When she had passed them around and they had been approved, Dick said they were almost as good as cookies just out of the oven, and he couldn't say more in their praise.

"Was that the time you went to the kitchen? Susan, you never invited me to eat hot cookies," cried Charlie. "I didn't know Dick was such an intimate friend."

"You don't always know quite as much as you think you do," Dick observed.

"Say, Charlie," said Bessie, "do you know who wrote the note that was found in the candy bag?"

"Me? How should I know?" was the innocent reply. "But did you hear about old Knightie rowing up Browinski? She would withdraw her patronage immediately if steps were not taken, and so on. Browinski got mad as fire, and told her she might go somewhere else with her patronage. It wouldn't break him. There's one thing, the more she fusses the more certain it is to go on," he added.

"Why?" asked Susan.

"Well, she is just keeping up the fun. That is all it is."

"I don't see much fun in those slushy notes," Dick observed.

"No, Grandpa, I suppose you don't. But it is fun to show the old lady she isn't as smart as she thinks. If you won't tell, I'll show you something." Charlie took a folded paper from his pocket.

"Tell who? Mrs. Knight?" Dick asked.

"You should say, 'Tell whom?'" corrected Charlie. "But though you are illiterate, I'll trust you." He held the paper, which appeared quite blank, to the fire, and presently writing began to show upon it.

"I know," exclaimed Bessie. "It is milk.

That is the latest. Rena has to drink a glass before she goes to bed, and the girls steal it or beg it from her to write letters."

"Read us your billet-doux, Charlie," said Dick.

"What! so much company this wet day? I thought I should be the only caller," said a voice behind them, and there in the door stood Miss Grant. She minded the weather as little as the boys, but she carried an umbrella and in consequence did not shed so much water when she came indoors.

Before she had fairly accepted the hospitality of the big chair and the pralines, Holliday's bright face looked in. "A party, and without me?" she cried, surveying the sociable group.

"Never, if I have anything to do with it," answered Dick, gallantly.

"How sweetly he rises to the occasion, doesn't he?" murmured Charlie. "Dick's our model boy. Awfully glad to see you home, Holliday. Haven't had a bit of fun since you left."

"You needn't believe that, Holliday," Bessie interposed. "He has just been telling—"

but Charlie shook his head at her, putting a finger on his lip.

"By the way, what were you discussing when I came in?" Miss Grant inquired, passing the pralines to her next neighbor. "As I stood in the hall I heard Bessie exclaim 'Milk' in the tone of one who had unearthed some dark plot."

They all laughed except Holliday. "What about milk?" she wanted to know. "They look guilty, Miss Grant."

"Charlie knows most about it," said Dick. "Ask him. He was on the point of reading a love letter, when you came in."

Charlie waved the poker threateningly.

"We were talking about the trouble at the Knight School," Bessie explained.

"Yes? I have heard about it," Miss Grant said coolly. "I suppose Charlie was showing you how it was done."

"Now, Miss Grant, you needn't believe everything Dick says. I said Mrs. Knight's carrying on so, only made matters worse. There's nothing awful about it. It is only fun."

"There may be truth in what you say, but



“‘A PARTY, AND WITHOUT ME?’ SHE CRIED.”

on the other hand I am not one who thinks there is excuse for everything in the word 'fun.' I have some sympathy for Mrs. Knight. There is, I think, always danger in such underhand, clandestine performances. They are exciting, I suppose, but I do like people to be honest and open, fair and square. I dislike silly sentimentality, and that is what it leads to. It is playing with fire in more ways than one." Miss Grant spoke with emphasis, and somehow in her wholesome, candid presence, writing notes with milk and concealing them in candy bags, seemed less amusing and rather tricky.

"Perhaps such things are inevitable, like whooping cough and measles, but I should be glad to have my particular boys and girls escape," she added.

Charlie, evidently feeling it desirable to have a change of subject, plunged into the first thing that occurred to him. "Say, Miss Grant, do you think it is always wrong to tell a lie?"

"Why, Charlie Willard, of course she does," Bessie cried, horrified.

"I think you aren't going to entrap me into

an argument," Miss Grant answered, smiling. "I know you agree with me that truth is our dearest possession. Civilized society is founded upon it. You know yourself how you feel towards a person whose word you can't trust. How insulting you feel it is to be called a liar. On the other hand if the opportunity ever comes to you to save a noble life, we'll say as the nun did in 'Les Misérables,' by telling an untruth, then tell it. But the question whether it is ever right to sacrifice truth for any small, personal end, is beneath the consideration of well-bred persons."

"Now will you be good?" whispered Holli-day, and everybody laughed at Charlie's crushed expression.

When Susan's visitors were all leaving at once, she remembered she had a little St. Joseph for Bessie, and ran upstairs to get it. It was in a box with some other things, she knew, but where had she put it? She opened one drawer after another without finding it. "I put everything away in such a hurry this morning I can't remember where it is," she had to tell Bessie. "I'll look for it to-night."

"It always pays to put your mind on the

thing you are doing," her mother remarked, when Susan returned to her search after Bessie had gone.

"I suppose it does," she owned meekly. "It is funny," she added, "I didn't hear a sermon all the time I was in New Orleans, except on Sunday, and I have heard two or three to-day."

CHAPTER XXI

ONLY A JOKE

“Do look at Phil and Charlie! Don’t you know they have been up to some mischief?” exclaimed Nettie Tryon.

A meeting of the Thimbles was just over and she was standing with Susan at the gate of Christmas Tree House, talking to Holliday. The two boys were coming towards them, plainly in high glee.

“What have you been doing now?” Holliday demanded.

“Please, ma’am, nothing at all,” laughed Phil.

“Oh, go on and tell,” urged his companion.
“It’s the best joke you ever heard.”

“Tell it yourself if you want to,” said Phil.

“Do tell, please, especially if it is funny,” begged the girls.

“Well,” began Charlie, nothing loath, “you know Puckers?”

They knew him. He was one of the young-

est professors at the High School, and because of some slight facial peculiarity, had earned this nickname.

“Well, Puckers asked Phil for Miss Carol Johnston’s address. He wanted to send her a complimentary copy of his new book. It seems he met her at a dance last winter and was smitten, but Carol has been out of town ever since. Phil, the rascal, gave him the wrong address! Don’t you know Miss Carrie Johnston who lives on Sixth Street? She goes to our church, Susan.”

“That funny-looking Miss Johnston who gives music lessons?” Susan exclaimed. “Why, she is an old, old maid.”

“You see,” Phil interposed, “he said he had looked in the telephone book and there were so many Johnstons he didn’t know t’other from which. That put it into my head. It was all on the spur of the moment.”

“Oh, but he did it up brown, though,” continued Charlie. “He told him to be sure to write Caroline.”

“Phil Grant! You ought to be ashamed!” Holliday cried, laughing. “Do you suppose she got it?”

"Indeed she did, and she is tickled to death. She brought it over to show to Mother. I heard her talking in the parlor. She said she met Professor Miles once last winter at a church social, and liked him ever so much, but really she had hardly seen him since." Charlie's manner was very coy as he repeated this.

"I think it was mean," Nettie said flatly.

"Now what's the harm?" demanded Phil.
"Puckers can send another to Carol."

"But it is making fun of poor Miss Johnston," said Susan.

"She deserves to be made fun of for being so silly," Holliday declared.

"She'll never know. She has written him the sweetest note by this time," laughed Charlie.

"Would that I might see Puckers when the truth breaks upon him!" said Phil.

"When he does, 'Blessings on you, little man!'" and Charlie patted him gleefully on the shoulder.

"It was all a mistake, which I regret deeply. It is easy to be confused with such a number of Johnstons," Phil replied solemnly.

"Boys, you are coming to Bessie's candy-pulling Friday night, aren't you?" Holliday asked.

"Surely we are, and don't you forget it," responded Charlie, and went off singing,

"All the darkies will be there,
Don't forget to curl your hair."

"I have a compliment for you," Holliday called after him. "Somebody said you were a typical minister's son."

"Bessie wants us all to wear gingham dresses," Susan said as she and Nettie walked on together. "It is more fun to pull candy if you have on something that will wash."

The idea of a candy-pulling had been received with joy when Bessie proposed it. For weeks and weeks they had done nothing but dig, Holliday said. It was time for a little diversion.

Bessie said a candy-pulling was the easiest thing you could have, that was really fun. It didn't matter if the cook was ill and the housemaid had to leave early, for you could do it all yourself. The Manns were often in trouble about servants.

Her guests were invited for half-past seven and came promptly, the girls looking so pretty in their wash dresses that Dick exclaimed he thought they were not going to dress up.

"Mine is nothing but batiste," Lily explained, smoothing her blue ruffles. "Miss Tillie hasn't finished any of my gingham, but I thought this would do."

"I didn't mean anything as pretty as that," Bessie said. "It makes me look like the cook, which I am. Come out to the kitchen, all of you. We shall have to wait on ourselves. Some of you can butter the plates while I watch the candy. Susan, you be ready to pour in the vanilla. It is there on the table."

From the kettle on the stove a delicious perfume arose. Bessie stood over it, watching and testing a few drops of its contents in cold water now and then. It was almost done, she reported. She was famous for her candy. "Part of it is to be nut," she said. "That goes in the big platter. Now, Susan! Now, Tom!" And the one dropped in the vanilla, and the other lifted the kettle and poured its contents into the plates, which were then carried outside to cool.

Susan noticed Tom and Charlie with their heads together, and caught some significant glances in Dick's direction. She was wondering what it meant when Holliday whispered, "They are going to play a joke on Dick. I made Tom tell me." And drawing her aside, she continued, "Charlie has some percussion caps, and after a while they are going to put them on the walk and send Dick out."

"Oh, but—" Susan began.

"Now, Susan, don't you go and make a fuss. It won't hurt him," Holliday cried, before Susan had time to finish her sentence. "It will just upset his gravity, as Charlie says. Dick is so terribly dignified at times."

"I'm not going to make a fuss. Only I don't think they ought to," Susan said uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry I told you, but if you say anything they will laugh at you."

This was perfectly true, Susan knew. If she protested they would say she was taking Dick's part, and anyway she hated to be a marplot. It probably wouldn't do any harm. Just then Nettie called, "Dick, I believe those boys have some joke on you," and he answered cheer-

fully, "Don't worry about me, I'm used to it."

"Boys, you might bring it in now," Bessie said, and obediently they trooped out.

"There is one more plate," Charlie announced, after his second trip. "It is on the cellar door. You get it, Dick."

Dick, who was busy with a knife getting Susan's candy out of the plate for her, answered, "Very well, in a minute." He had not finished his task when Miss Carrie Mann looked in to say some one wanted him at the telephone.

Nobody realized that Bessie had gone for the missing plate, though Lily afterwards remembered hearing her say she was afraid Dick's candy would be too hard. At the moment they were all very much occupied. Then suddenly they were startled by two sharp reports, followed by screams.

"Somebody is shot! Open the door, quick!" Holliday cried, laughing.

"Where's Bessie? It's Bessie!" Susan exclaimed.

For a moment there was confusion. It is not easy to get rid of a mass of sticky candy

in a hurry. Still, it couldn't have been more than two seconds before the door was opened, to reveal Bessie with her dress in flames, screaming in terror and pain.

It was Charlie, who could move with wonderful quickness in spite of his lame ankles, who saw the piece of old carpet, used to cover the ice-cream freezer and left hanging on a line near by, and dashing down the kitchen steps had it around Bessie before any of the others had their scattered wits working. The carpet was damp and quickly smothered the fire.

Somebody ran to call a doctor while they got Bessie into her father's office, protesting bravely that she was not much hurt, and a young physician from the next block came hurrying in. Mrs. Mann and Miss Carrie were with Bessie, and Ellie sat on the stairs and cried. A forlorn group gathered in the parlor and spoke in whispers, feeling in the way, yet unwilling to leave till they heard whether Bessie was badly injured.

"It would not have hurt me," Dick said when the cause of the accident had been explained. "It was Bessie's thin dress."

"It is my fault," confessed Charlie, wrapping his handkerchief about his right hand, which was scorched. "I was the one who proposed it. I'm your villain, Holliday. You were right after all."

"We are all villains," Holliday said. "We let you do it."

"They were my caps," put in Phil.

"And I was a coward," Susan owned sadly. "I was afraid you would laugh at me if I said you ought not to do it."

There was some little comfort in confessing, although it didn't help Bessie, as Nettie sternly pointed out.

By and by Tom, who had been running errands, came in to say that Bessie was not so badly burned as they feared at first. The upper part of her body not at all, except her hands. The fire had been put out so quickly the burns were not any of them deep. So they went home relieved.

The next day, however, the news was not so good. A fragment of one of the caps had imbedded itself in her right ankle, and there was danger of blood poisoning. This danger

passed happily, however, and in a week Bessie was beginning to recover.

“Uncle Allan was going to take Charlie to Chicago with him next month, but now he has to stay at home for punishment,” Lily reported.

This was a severe punishment for Charlie, as they all knew. He had been talking all winter about this trip to Chicago. Everybody was sorry for him, for the mischievous boy was a great favorite. His grandmother even tried to beg him off, but Dr. Willard was firm. There had been too much practical joking, he said.

Phil, with the feeling perhaps that to do something disagreeable made up a little for his share in the unfortunate accident, went to Professor Miles and apologized to him for giving the wrong address. “And I’m blessed if he didn’t laugh,” Phil told a little group gathered in the garden of Christmas Tree House. “It had been a bit awkward, he said, but no real harm done. Puckers is all wool and double width.”

“We have to choose between the sands of

pleasure and the rock of duty," observed Holliday, sententiously and irrelevantly.

"Who is pointing morals now?" asked Susan.

"Do you suppose that old Wise Man ever had any fun?" Charlie inquired pensively.

"Why, Charlie, you can have fun without being in mischief. Think of our winter picnic, for instance," said Susan.

"I wonder what became of all the candy?" Nettie suddenly remarked. In the days that had passed since the accident no one had so much as thought of it until now the news had come to them that Bessie was very much better.

CHAPTER XXII

BESSIE'S ROOM

THEY all longed to make up to Bessie for her painful injury. As she grew better she was stormed with attentions. Flowers, fruit, and every description of dainty found their way to the Manns' door, in an endless procession. When she was ready for company, her friends were ready and eager to sit by her and amuse her hours at a time. Holliday gave up the matinée to take her turn in reading to her. Susan put aside her objections to encountering the Mann family, and endured Miss Carrie's questions and Ellie's jokes, for the sake of cheering Bessie.

Bessie had never been ill before. Now that she was withdrawn from the family life, her worth was discovered. The Manns lived in a merry, helter-skelter way. When anything was mislaid, and it happened a dozen times a day, somebody was sure to say, "Ask Bessie." Everything now had to give way to her.

Bessie was in her mother's room, and in the general shifting which became necessary, Ellie had to sleep with Patsy. "I don't wonder Bessie was cross," Ellie said, "having to room with that restless child."

"She will be some time in recovering from the shock," the doctor told them. "She must have a room to herself." But how could it be managed?

Then some one had an inspiration. There was that little sewing-room at the back of the house. Why not cut another window in it and let her have that?

Miss Grant, who was often at the Manns', thought it would be the very thing, and suggested keeping it as a surprise. "For her birthday," said Carrie. And so the plan grew.

First, Mrs. Boone hearing of it asked to be allowed to paper it. Bessie admired Lily's room so much. She had sent to Chicago for that paper, and had a roll left. She would write at once and see if it could be matched. Mrs. Mann said she should have a new white bed, and this suggested white enamel paint for some other pieces of furniture.

Tom offered to do the painting, and the other boys, hearing of it, begged to be allowed to help. So under Miss Grant's supervision the Spades took up the paint-brush as one man.

The girls had no idea of being left behind, and devoted all their spare moments to sewing. Right under Bessie's nose the covers for her cushions were made, while she supposed them to be for the bazaar. Everybody who heard of the new room was interested, and gifts came pouring in as if for a wedding.

By her birthday she was beginning to walk about. "Well, Bess," her father said, "we are going to give you a room to yourself. It isn't a very big one, but I think it will hold you."

Bessie, who couldn't imagine where there was an extra room, big or little, to be had in that house, followed him in much wonderment, while the other members of the family hung over the banisters, and peeped from doors, under orders not to make a fuss.

Nothing was lacking in that little rose-colored chamber, from the pincushion to the white frilled window curtains. Bessie stood at the door and stared in bewilderment. In the

Manns' big, shabby house, this dainty room was almost unbelievable.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "It is like a fairy tale. As if a fairy had waved a wand. It can't be for me?"

"Yes, it is, my dear, and you deserve it, too, for your patience," her mother said, kissing her. And Patsy here burst in and began pointing out the beauties, as if Bessie had lost her eyes.

Everywhere were little cards wishing her a happy birthday, and many happy returns; from the family, from the boys and girls, from Miss Grant and the Brocade Lady; and each card was attached to something both useful and pretty. Bessie, not being quite strong yet, was rather overcome. She sat down in the rocking-chair in which were the pretty cushions she had admired when Holliday and Lily were working on them; beneath her feet was a soft, mossy green rug, on the wall before her hung a water color of an autumn woodland.

"I can never thank everybody enough," she said helplessly.

"It doesn't look much like us, does it?" her

sister Carrie said, from the doorway. "It is little and peaceful and pretty, and we are big and noisy and shabby."

"It is big enough," said Bessie, rising at once to the defense of her room. "I am going to ask the girls to bring their mending next Saturday. I'm well now."

"Did you ever see any one improve as Bessie has, and all in a minute?" the Brocade Lady exclaimed one day. "Why, she is growing almost pretty."

"All Bessie needed was a little room," Mrs. Boone answered, laughing, and there was much truth in the joke.

She had been well for some months when the Brocade Lady made her remark, but the birthday room had not lost one bit of its charm. "I'm happy when I am in it, and I'm happy thinking about it when I'm away," she told Miss Grant. "It is fun to wake up in it every morning."

Miss Grant said she wished Phil had a room it was fun to wake up in.

"We have had lots of fun this winter, but after all I believe Bessie's room was the most fun of all," Holliday said.

CHAPTER XXIII

SKETCHES

IN these days Mr. Lemoyne appeared to be devoting himself almost exclusively to his book,—at least, so Miss Cornelia said. The first enthusiasm over him having passed, some brave spirits were heard to declare he did not know as much about art as he professed, that in fact his lectures had been found word for word in certain volumes in the library. However, there was some argument about this. He did not claim to have original ideas on all subjects; of course he quoted authorities. Every lecturer did, Miss Cornelia Reynor was heard to say.

“Still, Cornelia,” objected Mrs. Boone, “you can’t blame a person for begrudging five or ten dollars for a course on art, when they could have gone to the library and read it all in Morris and Ruskin.”

“I am sure you might say the same about

our papers for the missionary society," insisted Miss Cornelia. "Anybody could look up the information for themselves, but we save them the trouble."

"Nobody pays to hear us, though," Mrs. Boone replied. "What is he doing here so long, anyway? Why should he come here to write a book on Southern homes?"

Miss Reynor did not know. "But so long as he behaves himself, I can't see that is anybody's business but his own," she said firmly.

"That is all very well," Mrs. Boone remarked later to the Brocade Lady, "and I wouldn't say anything to Cornelia, but there is a question whether he does behave himself. I am not saying how I heard it, but it came to me not so very indirectly, that he is a gambler; that these frequent business trips are for some such purpose. I took a dislike to him at Lily's party last Christmas. He had been so nice to the girls, helping them plan their teas, that I asked him to come over with Cornelia, if he cared to. He spent the whole evening flirting with Clarice Dumont. Sitting around in corners and behind palms. Why, the man must be well over thirty!"

The Brocade Lady too was beginning to have her doubts about Miss Reynor's boarder. "That letter to the Thomases that Cornelia makes so much of, does not amount to a paper of pins," she said. "Annie doesn't know where that Mr. Johnston is, and she owned she was not at all familiar with his handwriting."

"Dear me, you don't say so! Really I think it ought to be looked into," exclaimed Mrs. Boone.

Whether or not he was unconsciously influenced by such adverse criticisms, Mr. Lemoyne began about this time to refer to an early departure. He might be summoned away on a moment's notice, he said, and he packed most of his belongings and sent them off somewhere.

Mr. Reynor could not refrain from hoping he would not be kept in suspense for long; but Mr. Lemoyne paid no attention to him, continuing to address Miss Cornelia, saying gayly that it was better to be ready and not go, than to go and not be ready. A thousand times better, when going meant parting from his kind hostess! Words like these warmed Miss Cornelia's heart. Her brother, who like Mrs. Boone had heard rumors regarding those trips

to Cincinnati, decided it was best not to trouble her with them.

In view of a possible early departure, Mr. Lemoyne made a courteous request to be allowed to sketch a few interior details in Christmas Tree House and make a few measurements. The main stairway and the mantel in the school-room, he mentioned in particular. Mr. Heywood saw no objection, but observed that the mantel in question was rather commonplace. To which Mr. Lemoyne replied that there was something in its admirable proportions and simple lines that appealed to him. He trusted he did not make himself annoying, and begged to be told if he should be in the way.

He was assured he would not be in the way. Almost any afternoon the school-room would be at his disposal, and Mrs. Lawrence's absence in Washington for a week made it equally convenient for his sketch of the staircase.

So it chanced that Holliday, coming downstairs one afternoon, ready for a walk, found Mr. Lemoyne in the hall making strokes on his drawing board with thoughtful deliberation.

Up to this time she had never found an opportunity to ask him about his acquaintance with Miss Avery. A few steps from the bottom she paused, buttoning her glove. "Mr. Lemoyne," she said, with rather startling abruptness, "do you know a person—a lady—named Avery?"

At the question a singular expression crossed his face. "Avery?" he repeated vaguely, "Avery?"

"Yes, Miss Beatrice Avery."

"I have met a person of that name. Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Susan said she saw you talking to her at my aunt's in New Orleans. I wondered if she could have been mistaken."

In the drawing-room Dick was waiting for Holliday. "It took him a long time to decide whether he knew her or not," he remarked when they were outside.

Now that spring was in the air a walking club had been organized by the girls and boys, of which Miss Grant was the moving spirit. She was an enthusiastic botanist, and knew a good deal about birds; and without any attempt to be instructive she made herself so in-

teresting that no one willingly missed one of those afternoons in the country.

As they walked on towards the corner where they were to meet the others and take the car, Holliday replied, "Yes, it really made me feel there was something queer about his knowing her." Then she went on to tell Dick about the conversation Susan had overheard. "We thought perhaps he was afraid we might tell Clarice," she said.

"Is that affair still going on?" Dick asked in surprise.

The sight of Susan and Charlie waving to them put Mr. Lemoyne and Clarice out of their minds for the rest of the afternoon, but meeting Dick several days later, Holliday told him that the gentleman had satisfactorily explained his embarrassment at her question.

"He said Miss Avery nursed his mother in her last illness, and from the way he spoke it can't have been very long ago. The circumstances were extremely distressing, he said, and he could not bear any reference to it. You see, I took him by surprise. He had some business with Miss Avery that day."

Dick whistled softly. "He didn't look exactly melancholy," he remarked.

"And he didn't when he talked to Miss Avery," Susan added. "He thanked her for the chink."

"I have no doubt he had lent her money," interrupted Holliday. "I don't care, Susan, I felt sorry for him, and you would have, too."

"Rats!" was Dick's irreverent exclamation.

Mr. Lemoyne was unlucky in regard to the school-room drawings. Something was always happening to interrupt him. The servants were cleaning, or washing windows, or the girls were there. It was perhaps foolish, he owned, but he liked to be alone when he was making those little drawings. If "Southern Homes" was to amount to anything, it must be in the spirit in which it was done. In a way he dreamed his best work, he said. Whatever this might mean, Miss Cornelia felt it to be so impressive that she was impelled to repeat it to Reggie.

The Poet was guilty of heartless laughter.

"I am sure, Reggie, it sounds very much like some of the things you say," she exclaimed.

“Please call my attention to it if I ever do it again, Cornelia,” was his response.

One of Mr. Lemoyne’s attempts in the school-room was interrupted by Robin Bright, who came in search of Holliday, and decided to wait, when he failed to find her. He sat on a chair swinging his heels and firing questions at the artist in a thoroughly obnoxious way, until Holliday and Susan came in.

“Don’t go, Mr. Lemoyne,” Holliday said cordially. “We are just going to play a game or two of ‘Tommy Come Tickle Me,’ with Robin here in the window.” But the gentleman insisted upon withdrawing, not in the best of humors.

“Say, Holliday,” Robin began, after he had been Tommy several times and the first joy of victory had waned a little, “Mr. Lemoyne has a key to the cupboard.”

“Nonsense, Robin! What do you mean?”

“I peeped in the door and he was looking in, and he shut it quick!” Robin brought his hands together with a smack. “And he put the key in his pocket.”

“Robin, that is nonsense. Here is my

key,"—Holliday produced it,—“and Mr. Lemoyne couldn't have another.”

Robin was a famous romancer, and on this occasion as upon others little attention was paid to his story.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CHIMNEY CUPBOARD

SUSAN was greatly disappointed that she could not go walking with the others that delicious spring afternoon, but Mother had made an engagement for her to have her coat fitted.

“You need it now, Susan,” she said, “and if you put the tailor off, some one will get your place and there is no telling when you will have it.”

This was true, and Susan wanted her new coat; but it seemed a dreadfully stupid way to spend the afternoon when you might be in the country. To make her regret deeper, the tailor was ready for her, and kept her so short a time that she might have asked the walkers to wait if she had known.

It was too late now to think about this, however, and she walked slowly homewards, feeling as she used to when she was a little girl and had nobody to play with. She stopped at the Manns', but Mrs. Boone had taken Bes-

sie for a drive. Then she remembered the book Holliday had told her she might have. It was the second volume of a series in which they were deeply interested.

“I think it is on the table in my room,” Holliday had said. “If it isn’t, it is on the revolving bookcase in the school-room.”

She went first to Holliday’s room, and not finding what she was in search of went down to the school-room. The house was very quiet. Mrs. Lawrence was still in Washington, and the only servants she saw were Parker, who was polishing the brass in the library, and Melinda the cook, singing to herself in the kitchen, with the door ajar.

The school-room looked inviting, in its orderly stillness. One of the side windows was partially raised, and the muslin curtain moved ever so slightly to and fro. The revolving bookcase was in the corner between this window and the front one, past which the stone steps curved up to the porch.

Susan did not at first see the book and sat down on the floor to look for it, and when she came upon it on the bottom shelf, still sitting there Turk fashion she began to turn its pages.

In a few seconds more she had forgotten where she was.

Above her head the curtain moved softly in the breeze, outside the cheerful clatter of the street sounded, and at the other end of the hall Melinda was singing to herself. The school-room door was half open.

The click of the latch aroused Susan. With a nervous start she peeped around the bookcase, expecting to see Parker, but instead, it was Mr. Lemoyne, and he had closed the door behind him. He had come, of course, to finish his drawing. Susan felt annoyed at the idea of having to scramble out from behind the bookcase. She hesitated a moment, and in that moment, completely shielded from view as she was, she saw Mr. Lemoyne lay his drawing book on the table and walk to the mantel. She could not see what he was doing there, but—surely that was the sound of a key turning in a lock!

She remembered Robin's story. Had he a key, after all? But why should he open the cupboard? Was he a thief? Susan's heart was in her throat at the thought that Holli-day's miniature was probably there, the one

Madame Theo had given her. Mr. Lemoyne had seen and admired it. Susan knew it was very valuable, for both Holliday's father and aunt had insisted it must be put in the safe, yet somehow the willful Holliday had managed to keep it.

She wore it on a chain inside her dress, and only this morning the clasp had broken and she had put it in the cupboard for safety, while she walked to the corner with Susan and Lily, after class. Mr. Lemoyne had perhaps found out about it, but Susan did not reason about this, she felt so sure that it was the miniature he wanted.

She must not be a coward. She must save it for Holliday. She would so hate to lose it. But what could she do? Her heart beat so fast she was almost suffocated. Could she crawl very softly behind the big chair, and then reach the door before he could stop her? As she tried to think what to do, she heard the sound of boards being pried up. Still she was so sure about the miniature that she did not stop to wonder at this.

She moved cautiously forward. Perhaps she was a little stiff from sitting so long on her

feet, for as she sprang up she struck the dictionary stand and sent it with a startling bang to the floor. Mr. Lemoyne was at the door before her, his back against it, looking at her with that expression she hated so, that made her think of Monsieur Rigaud.

“O Lord, please send somebody to help me?” was Susan’s inward exclamation. Aloud she said tremulously, “You mustn’t take it. It’s Holliday’s.”

“You little fool, I don’t want anything of Holliday’s!” he said. “Listen to me. If you will keep quiet and do as I tell you, you have nothing to fear; but if you scream, I’ll kill you! Hear?”

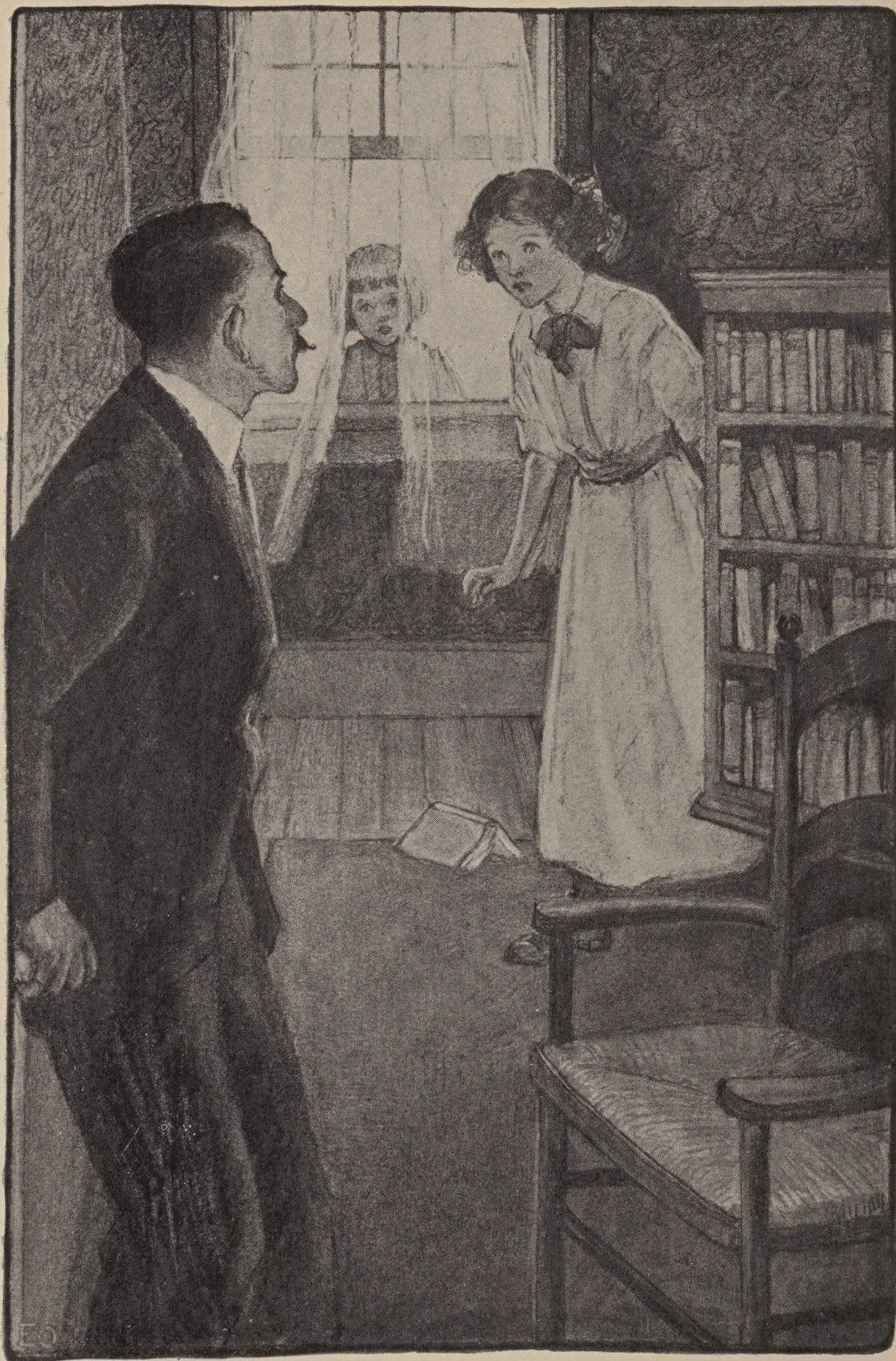
She was such a little girl, and he was a man! but Susan wasn’t thinking this. In a flash she remembered that Miss Cornelia was at work in her flower beds as she passed. If she could get to that window and give one scream,—the thing she should have done at first,—surely somebody would come before he had time to kill her. The muslin curtain moved gently. The cheerful clatter of the street seemed so near.

All this was in a lightning flash, and at the

same time she was praying, "O Lord, send somebody!"

Somebody was at hand, but neither Mr. Lemoyne nor Susan saw the round eyes peering in at the front window where the curtains parted ever so little, but where the cross-light made things inside quite visible.

Susan, making a nervous dart towards the open window, was conscious of a grip on her shoulder, of trying to scream, of falling down, down into whirling darkness.



"SOMEBODY WAS AT HAND."

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT WAS WORTH WHILE

THE Reynors' front lawn was separated from that of Christmas Tree House by a vine-covered iron fence, along which on the Reynors' side was a flower bed, at present bright with many-colored tulips. Miss Cornelia, at work among them, looked up as her brother came in the gate. "Did you ever see anything prettier?" she asked proudly.

Before he could reply they were both startled by the sound of a child's voice in distress. "Somebody come quick! He's killing Susan! Come quick! He's killing Susan in the school-room!" It was Robin Bright who was jumping up and down on the other side of the fence, waving his arms in an ecstasy of terror.

Mr. Reynor was by his side in an instant, thanks to a pair of long legs. "What do you mean, Robin? Where?" he cried.

Miss Cornelia dropped her trowel and rose from her knees, just in time to see them disappear among the shrubbery. So agonized were Robin's tones, her heart stood still for a moment. Something dreadful must have happened. Being unable to vault the fence, she had to take the longer way round; and as she hastened tremblingly along the street to the gate of Christmas Tree House, she was gripped by the fear that Reggie would be killed, too.

Even in her terror she was conscious of the air of stately repose pervading the place. It seemed impossible that anything terrible could be happening here. As she ran to the basement door and lifted her hand to ring the bell, the door opened; in fact, it was flung open, in evident haste, by her boarder.

So great was her confidence in him, that Miss Cornelia's first sensation was one of relief, quickly followed however by renewed alarm as he brushed roughly past her without a word. A vague idea that he was going for help occurred to her, and was confirmed when she reached the open door of the school-room and saw her brother bending over Susan,

who lay apparently unconscious on the sofa where he had just placed her, a trickle of blood on her cheek.

“Oh, Reggie, is she badly hurt? How did it happen? Mr. Lemoyne has gone for the doctor, I think. She has cut her head and has fainted. Get me some water.” Miss Cornelia took command at once.

And now came Parker and Melinda, summoned by Robin, and in a few moments more Dr. Thomas, who by a lucky chance had been calling at the Seymours', and was seen by Parker from the door. Miss Cornelia continued under the impression that Mr. Lemoyne had summoned him.

Before the doctor reached her side, however, Susan had opened her eyes. “There, now you will be all right,” Miss Cornelia said. “Lie still, dearie. You have had a bad fall and cut your head.”

Susan gazed vaguely about, trying to recall what had happened.

“Mr. Lemoyne has gone for the doctor,” Miss Cornelia added encouragingly.

At this everything came back with a rush.

Susan started up. "Did he get it?" she asked anxiously.

"What's all this?" demanded Dr. Thomas, coming in. "Susan hurt? What a bump! Did you fall downstairs?"

"No—I—he said he would kill me. I ran and fell and—" but now her tears overflowed.

"The best thing you can do," the doctor said, sitting beside her and feeling her pulse. "Now let's see the bump. You must have struck the sharp edge of something when you fell. By the way, who was going to kill you?"

Almost incoherently, Susan sobbed out the name.

"What!" cried the doctor.

"Did he knock you down, Susan?" Mr. Reynor asked quietly.

"I saw him, Susan," exclaimed Robin. "I saw him killing you."

"I don't think he did. I tried to get to the window, and tripped and fell. He caught my shoulder."

"And you cut your head and fainted," added the doctor. "But what was the fellow up to?"

Brokenly, while he attended to her cut,

Susan told her story. Her audience listened with varying emotions; Parker and Melinda with many exclamations.

"It is all a terrible mistake," cried Miss Cornelia, but as she said it she recalled the strange expression on Mr. Lemoyne's face as he brushed by her. "Do you mean he is a thief? You can't think that!" She looked from her brother to the doctor, in helpless bewilderment.

"I don't know what he was up to, but he was at the cupboard when I climbed in at the window. These sketching operations have been made the cloak for some villainy," said her brother.

"Surely not to get possession of Holliday's miniature," said Dr. Thomas. "Like Miss Cornelia, I scarcely think he was a common thief."

"No, rather uncommon, I fancy," the Poet answered. "I do not say he was after the miniature. I am inclined to think Susan mistaken there. Just come and look at this cupboard, doctor. See this loose paneling? My theory is he was trying to get possession of something hidden here. I don't explain it. I

can't say how he knew there was anything here, if there is, but I am convinced that Susan prevented the accomplishment of his purpose, whatever it was."

Dr. Thomas peered into the cupboard curiously, lifting the loosened boards and feeling beneath them. "There is something there," he said. "Well, my advice is to get Mr. Heywood as soon as you can. In the meantime I'll take Susan home. She'll turn out to be a heroine, first thing you know," he added, laughing.

When the doctor's carriage turned the corner from which you could see the post office clock, Susan was surprised to find it only ten minutes after four. It had been three when she left the tailor's, and it seemed hours and hours ago. Her head ached and she felt rather trembly and excited, but otherwise not much the worse for her experience.

About two hours later she sat in Father's big chair in the dining-room. She wore her pink challis, and her bump was plastered up artistically. At least Dr. Thomas said it was artistic. Wynk was bestowing upon her the solace of his society, sitting on the arm of her chair with

his paws tucked under him. Through the open window the scent of some flowering shrub floated in now and then, and from the kitchen came the creaking of Silvy's biscuit machine. Susan felt languid and happy. If only she could be sure about the miniature, she was thinking, when Holliday dashed in.

"Why, Susan!" she cried, falling upon her with embraces and—yes, actually, tears! "I thought you would be in bed. I was afraid they would not let me see you. You are the bravest girl in the world! I always knew it! And that horrible man! I can never forgive myself." She paused, out of breath.

"I never heard of going to bed just for a bump," Susan said, laughing. "Mother wanted me to. But, oh, Holliday, did he get your miniature?"

Holliday, who was kneeling before her, sat back on her heels. "It wasn't in the cupboard, Susan. It is safe. I had put it away. I am just as much obliged to you, though. But you can't guess what you did save!"

"What?" Susan asked eagerly.

"The bonds! You saved the bonds, Susan. Mrs. Carrol's bonds!" Holliday spoke sol-

emply, and Susan heard her with silent astonishment. "They were hidden in the cupboard, under the floor of it. They were in a sort of canvas cover and a nail had been driven through a corner of this, when the paneling was put back. It was that and your being there that kept him from getting away with them."

"The bonds?" Susan repeated, in amazement.

"Papa thinks he must have been trying in one way and another all winter to get them; that he must have known and come here for the purpose. Mr. Reynor thinks so, too. But how he knew about them is a mystery."

"He and Miss Avery must have been talking about the bonds," Susan said thoughtfully. "Why, Holliday, they must be what is worth while!"

"Of course," Holliday agreed. "'If it takes a year.' I had not thought of that. I'll show Papa those scraps to-night. He is ready now to pay some attention to the conversation you overheard. You were right about Mr. Lemoyne. You said he was a villain."

"No, I only said he looked like one. Where is he, Holliday? Will they arrest him?"

Susan shivered as she remembered the touch of his hand on her shoulder.

“He has gone no one knows where. I thought of course Papa would put detectives on his track, but he says Mr. Lemoyne didn’t succeed in getting anything and it would not be of any use.” Holliday seemed disappointed at such a tame ending. “He ought to be put in prison for the way he treated you,” she added.

The news of the affair spread rapidly, and all through the evening people were coming in to ask about Susan. She was put to bed immediately after supper, having had enough excitement, her mother said.

“Susan, you should never have tried to run after he warned you,” her father said after hearing the whole story. “It was foolish, for he had you in his power. I know you did not stop to think, but—”

“But, Father, I thought he would kill me anyway, he seemed so angry,” Susan said. “And I remembered Miss Cornelia was near.”

Susan could not understand the distress of

her father and mother, now it was all so happily over.

“It is over what might have happened, my darling,” Mrs. Maxwell said.

“It seems to me that is worse than crossing bridges before you come to them,” Susan said, laughing.

CHAPTER XXVI

PUTTING TWO AND TWO TOGETHER

"THEY have you in the paper, Susan," her father remarked at the breakfast table.

"Oh, Frank, not really? I thought you asked the reporter not to," Mrs. Maxwell protested.

"When we have a heroine in the family, Kitty, we must accept the consequent publicity." The twinkle in her father's eye reminded Susan of Joe when he laughed at Mother Kitty's Philadelphia reserve. "Really there is nothing you need mind. They make rather a good story out of the whole thing. All assertions in regard to our missing friend are carefully avoided. It is alleged, and the evidence seems to point. 'That fifteen or twenty thousand dollars' worth of bonds are to-day in the hands of the proper authorities is no doubt owing to the presence in the school-room of Christmas Tree House of Miss Susan Maxwell, the daughter of our well-known citi-

zen, Mr. Frank Maxwell, and to the curiosity that led Robin Bright, the seven-year-old son of the popular rector of St. Mark's, to peep in at the window, at the psychological moment.' Here, Susan, you can read it for yourself."

"I am glad I helped to save the bonds, but it is silly to call me a heroine," Susan said, taking the paper.

"I think you were very brave, dear," Mrs. Maxwell insisted.

"Greatness is thrust upon you, you see," Father added, laughing.

Susan found the newspaper so interesting she could hardly eat her breakfast. The past history of Christmas Tree House was gone over once more, and the article ended with the statement that the bonds had been handed over to the National Trust Company, where they would be held until Colonel Brand was heard from. Nobody who knew the Colonel would believe that he made a hiding-place for his securities in an old chimney cupboard, but it was probable that he had a legal right to anything found on his premises.

"Even if they are the Colonel's, he will give them to the hospital, I'm sure," Susan said,

putting down the paper. "Miss Margaret would want him to."

After breakfast Mrs. Boone and Lily came over to ask how Susan was this morning. "Why, you look as bright as a button," the former said, kissing her. "It makes me shiver to think of it. It was a perfectly natural thing to do,—going into that room for a book. Who would have thought of any danger? It shows you can never tell, but I say to you as I say to Lily, don't ever go wandering around big houses alone."

"Susan, did you really faint?" Lily asked, regarding her with envy. "I never fainted in my life."

"I suppose I did," Susan owned, "but it was because I hit my head."

"Really she is not half as used up by the affair as Cornelia Reynor," Mrs. Boone continued. "Cornelia is distressed to death. She was really infatuated with that man. One minute she blames herself for being so easily taken in, and the next she feels sure he could explain everything satisfactorily if he had a chance. I haven't a doubt in the world he could make up a beautiful story, if he had the

time. I believe Cornelia fears they will capture him and bring him back in chains, but I doubt if they could make out a case against him. At any rate he's gone, and what's more he owes Cornelia for two months' board. Don't you breathe that, however. I asked her flatly, 'Cornelia, tell me honestly, what does that man owe you?' But she doesn't want Reggie to know. 'You see, Cornelia,' I said, 'Reggie was right after all;' and the funny part is," Mrs. Boone paused to laugh, "she was taking this boarder for his sake. In the meantime Reggie turned to and made good, as the saying is. I hear they are delighted with his work on the paper, and what with tutoring and playing the organ and his other writing, he has done well this winter, and certainly his health is better. I give Anne Mary Grant the credit for some of it. They are great friends, you know. She's drawn him out of his shell. And—what was I going to say? Oh, yes. Reggie has been sweet to Cornelia. Never once said 'I told you so.' That to me is an evidence of character in itself. Is that the carriage, Lily? Let me take you to market, Mrs. Maxwell. Lily can stay with Susan."

As she sat with Lily in the swinging seat on the porch, the girls and boys dropped in one by one to pay their respects to the heroine and talk it over.

“What do you think Robin asked me when I passed?” said Charlie. “He wanted to know if I didn’t think he ought to be given a medal for saving Susan’s life. There’s nothing backward about him.”

“He is very proud of being mentioned in the paper,” said Nettie, “but he wanted Uncle to call up the reporter and say that he was going on eight—not just seven.”

“Let’s fix him up a medal,” suggested Dick.

The idea took, and one of the boys ran to the nearest tin-shop for a piece of bright tin. This secured, the morning was spent in the manufacture of an imposing medal, with the inscription:

PRESENTED TO ROBIN BRIGHT

BY

THE GRATEFUL FRIENDS OF

SUSAN MAXWELL

FOR HIS HEROISM IN SAVING HER LIFE

Meanwhile the discussion of this latest ad-

venture went on. Little by little the whole thing grew plainer.

“It is like a dissected puzzle,” said Holliday, who was the last arrival. “You look and look, and think and think, and suddenly you find the piece that fits in. Susan, it flashed into my head this morning that Avery was the name of the nurse Aline talked about—the one who took care of Mrs. Carrol! Papa says if that is so, it throws a great deal of light.”

“It was, of course. I’m sure of it. I wonder why I didn’t think of it!” Susan exclaimed.

“What was it you and Susan knew about Mr. Lemoyne, and wouldn’t tell?” asked Nettie.

This brought out the story of the scraps blown into Susan’s lap on the car that day.

“I still have them, and I asked Papa if they would not be valuable evidence, but he laughed at me. He says it would be hard to prove that they referred to the bonds,” Holliday added.

“You think, then, that Mrs. Carrol must have told her nurse where she had hidden the bonds, and that the nurse told Mr. Lemoyne?” asked Phil.

"Yes. Mrs. Carrol began to tell Aline something about them, but couldn't finish. She had occasional flashes of memory."

"They hatched it up between them as an easy way of getting hold of a lot of money, I see."

"Do you think Mr. Lemoyne had anything to do with the Hallowe'en scare?" inquired Dick.

"I'll tell you what I think," cried Charlie. "The east parlor is over the school-room, don't you know, and perhaps to start out he wasn't quite sure where the cupboard was. He was investigating."

"Yes, and turned out the light when he heard Susan coming." Holliday nodded. "It is as plain as anything."

"And don't you remember, Holliday, the burglar the night of the Colonial Tea? Don't you think he undid the catch of that shutter under pretense of fastening it, and got in while the tea was going on?" Dick asked. "After that you began to lock the cupboard, so he had to steal your key and have one made. That is probably what he was at Bell's for,—the hardware place," said Dick.

"It works out beautifully!" Holliday exclaimed. "We never dreamed of anything so interesting as this when we began to write our story, did we, Susan?"

"We have not much more than begun, as it is," Susan observed.

"Well, I think that is fortunate. We can see what is really important when we look back. And, Susan, we'll have lots of time this summer. I must give Susan the credit of seeing through Mr. Lemoyne when I didn't," Holliday went on. "She said from the first he was a villain."

"No, I didn't. I only didn't like him, and said he looked like Monsieur Rigaud," said Susan.

"You wanted a villain, and did not recognize him when you saw him. Isn't that about it?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, I was like the other man, *insensée*," Holliday declared impressively. They had all been reading the story of the Wise Man in French this winter.

"She always gets what she wants," laughed Susan. "I never had an adventure in my life till I met her."

"What about Clarice?" asked Nettie. "I wonder how she feels? It seems to me she was the *insensée* one."

"What do you bet she hasn't run off with him?" said Charlie.

"I think we should have heard of it by this time if she had," answered Holliday. "But I am very sorry for her. It will be a great shock to her to find that all his glitter was not gold."

A marked copy of the paper went out to Joe in Colorado. His reply was: "Hurrah for Susan Hermione! Didn't I say she was a heroine?" At the end he added, "Under another cover, as the saying is, I am sending a little testimonial of my brotherly regard."

The testimonial arrived by express shortly after, and proved to be a little watch. Susan's breath was taken away.

"Dear, dear! that extravagant boy!" Mrs. Maxwell exclaimed.

"Isn't it darling!" gasped Susan. "Father, do you think he oughtn't to? Because—"

Mr. Maxwell laughed. "It is all right,"

he assured her. "It may be extravagant, but Joe is doing well and has paid his debts, so we must allow him this pleasure. Take it and enjoy it, my dear."

CHAPTER XXVII

CLARICE AND MISS GRANT

NEW bits of evidence, or of gossip, concerning the villain, as Holliday now invariably called him, continued to crop up for days, and even weeks. The Brocade Lady's son, it seemed, had chanced to see Mr. Lemoyne from the porch, and was impressed by his resemblance to a certain sharper he had met somewhere in his wanderings abroad. "He was not positive," the Brocade Lady said, but under the circumstances it was significant.

Miss Avery, it was soon discovered, had left Madame Theo abruptly, upon the receipt of a telegram. Some investigations in Mobile, where she had lived in her childhood, revealed the fact that she had a half-brother, a rather handsome, good-for-nothing fellow, whose description suited Miss Cornelia's boarder very well.

Miss Cornelia was perhaps the only person

who did not now own to certain suspicions of Mr. Lemoyne. At times she still felt there must be some terrible mistake, which would sometime be cleared away, but she knew it was silly and kept it to herself.

It illustrated the power of good manners, the Brocade Lady said. He was always courteous to Cornelia, and seemingly appreciative of her kindness.

“To the point of leaving without paying his board,” remarked Mrs. Boone, scornfully.

“I hate it when people are mysterious,” Bessie said, joining Holliday and Susan under the ginkgo tree one day. It was full of leaves now, and its beautiful shade was most grateful on a warm May afternoon.

“Sit down and tell us your trouble,” was Holliday’s invitation.

Bessie sat on the edge of the rustic chair and clasped her hands in her lap. “It’s about Clarice. Have you heard anything?”

“She is ill at her cousin’s,” Susan said. “Is that what you mean?”

“Everybody knows that. Father is attending her. Lily says she has been expelled. Her grandmother let it out without meaning to.”

“ Oh, Bessie! Do you think it is true? ” both girls exclaimed.

“ I am not certain, but I think perhaps she tried to run away.”

“ You don't mean with— Why, Bessie! ” Holliday said, “ I can't believe it.”

“ Something I heard Miss Grant say to Father made me think so. Something about a poor, silly girl, and Father answered that she was saved from a worse fate. They stopped talking when they saw me. Then I asked Carrie, and she said, ‘ Why, what do you mean, Bessie? ’ in a way that made me sure she knew something. I hate secret things,” she repeated.

“ Miss Grant is in the school-room now, correcting papers. I am going to ask her,” and Holliday sprang up and ran across the grass to one of the open school-room windows. Returning, she announced, “ She has promised to come and tell us about it.”

Miss Grant might not be a beauty, nor even pretty, but certainly she was pleasant to look at, as she came toward them a few minutes later and took the seat Holliday vacated for her beside Susan. Her abundant brown hair

had golden lights in it, her freckles only served to emphasize the fairness and smoothness of her skin and to show how little she cared for sun or wind. Her glance was direct and full of friendliness.

“Holliday says you have heard something about Clarice, and if so, it is better you should have the whole story, for nothing is worse than being left to fancy things.”

“I said that to Carrie,” murmured Bessie.

“There are two reasons for not saying much about it. On Clarice’s own account, and for the sake of Mrs. Knight.”

“Is it true she is expelled?” Susan asked.

“She will never go back there, that much is certain,” Miss Grant replied. “This man, who, say what we will, took us all in this winter, gained an almost absolute control over the poor girl. She seems to have been ready to do anything he told her, and they carried on a secret correspondence in one way and another all winter. Some of her schoolmates say she told them she was going to run away with him.”

“She told me she was going to be married

this summer," Holliday said. "She was dreadfully in love with him."

"We cannot tell now whether he was simply carrying on a heartless flirtation, or really intended to marry her. If he did, his failure to get the bonds interfered with his plans. All I know about it is this. Mr. Reynor and I were returning from my aunt's on Deane Avenue the evening following Susan's uncomfortable adventure. We were walking in, and were overtaken by a thunder shower, which forced us to seek shelter in a drug store. We were not far from that small station, where you know the trains stop for a moment coming and going, for the benefit of residents of the southern part of town. While we were waiting, the outgoing train passed.

"It was nearly eleven when the rain allowed us to leave our refuge, and it was then, as we went up a block to take the car, that I saw a forlorn, drenched figure shrink away from us into the shadow of the trees as we passed. I felt sure there was something wrong, and turned back to ask if she was in trouble, and to my great surprise I recognized Clarice Dumont. She broke into hysterical

crying, and we had a terrible time quieting her. I found she had stolen away from the school expecting to meet Mr. Lemoyne at the little station, which is not very far, you know. She had waited in that hard storm almost unprotected, for it is scarcely more than a shed, and when he did not appear, and the train went on, she was quite beside herself with fear and not knowing what to do or where to go."

"Poor Clarice! What did you do, Miss Grant?" Holliday asked.

"Mr. Reynor had to go back to the drug store and telephone for a cab, for she was in no condition to be on a street car. She protested wildly against being taken back to school, but it was all we could do. Mrs. Knight was very kind, but the next day it was thought best to send her to her cousin's till her mother comes. The girl is really very ill. She has been living all winter under the strain of an unwholesome excitement, and now her nerves have gone to pieces. Dr. Mann thinks she will have to be taken to a sanitarium for special treatment. Now I need not ask you, I am sure, not to talk about this, outside."

"Indeed we won't, Miss Grant," said Bes-

sie. "I wonder if she knows he was a thief?"

"I don't know what she has been told. In that respect she has had a fortunate escape."

"Do you remember, Susan, when I read your mother Clarice's letter,—the one in which she told about Mr. Lemoyne first,—she said it didn't sound like the real thing?" asked Holliday.

"It is odd," Miss Grant said thoughtfully, "how your Wise Man applies even to love affairs. Love like everything else in life must have a good foundation. Friendship, respect, confidence are necessary,—something more than an exciting flirtation."

"And it fell and great was the fall of it!" Holliday repeated gravely.

Miss Grant and Bessie went away together, leaving the other two in a serious mood. "I hope we shall never be carried away by a false glitter," Holliday said, adding, "Do you know, Susan, if I were a man I believe I should fall in love with Miss Grant?"

Later that afternoon, in a friendly conversation, over the wall, with the Poet, Holliday again voiced this sentiment. "You know

there is something—well, rather grand, about Miss Grant,” she said, “though that is not exactly what I mean.”

“Forceful? Commanding?” suggested Mr. Reynor, standing with his hands behind him and looking up at her.

Holliday considered the words thoughtfully. “Yes,” she said, “she is the sort of person who wouldn’t just be sorry for you if you were in trouble, but would help you out. She would find a way.”

“Broadly sympathetic, full of initiative,” added the Poet. “But does it occur to you that she is not likely to find any one worthy of her?”

Holliday had not thought of this. “Well,” she added hopefully, “perhaps she doesn’t care to marry.”

From the other side of a lattice fence Miss Grant overheard this conversation. She had been to inquire for Mrs. Seymour, who was more ailing than usual, and then had stopped on her way back to chat with Miss Cornelia, again at work in her garden. They had walked about looking at this and that till Miss Reynor left her by the lattice while she went into the

house for her shears. She wanted to send some roses to Mrs. Grant.

Just as Holliday jumped down, Miss Cornelia opened the gate. "Come and talk to Reggie," she said. "I have to speak to the plumber. It will be but a moment."

"Miss Holliday and I were just speaking of you," the Poet told her, shaking hands.

"I have to confess I overheard." Miss Grant laughed, and the pleasant glow deepened in her cheek.

"Then you know listeners do sometimes hear good of themselves?"

"Yes, I am much obliged. But it seems I am to be left lonely on the heights of superior virtue."

The Poet stood looking down at her as she sat on the garden bench. "I could never stand side by side with you up there," he said. "All I could hope to do would be to furnish you with an object upon which to exercise those virtues." Then he added, clasping his hands nervously, "You have taught me to aspire. You must forgive me if I have become presumptuous."

“Presumptuous, that one of your gifts should aspire to a commonplace person like me?” Miss Grant asked, smiling. “That’s too absurd, Reggie.”

And just then Miss Cornelia returned.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT SUMMER

"I DON'T expect ever to be an author," Holliday announced with emphasis. "Writing is such hard work. And after all, Susan, it is easier to tell a story after everything has happened. The Poet says so. I was consulting him yesterday. He said it was impossible to see the relative importance of things at the time. I wrote that down at once for fear I'd forget it. You have written a lot more than I have. I'll leave you my notes and you can finish after I am gone."

"Thank you! I supposed that was what you were coming to. I think I'll just tell Miss Margaret what we haven't written," Susan replied.

"Oh, Susan, you will see her and I'll be far away!" Holliday exclaimed sorrowfully.

Like so many things undertaken with great enthusiasm, the story had gradually become a burden and had at times been forgotten alto-

gether. They were always going to have time for it, but each season, when it came, was full. "The only way to get time is to take it," the Brocade Lady said. "You have all the time there is."

"I suppose it is true," Susan observed thoughtfully. "If you do one thing, you have to let something else go."

"I always want to do everything," Holliday cried.

"And always think you can," Susan added. Then she asked, "What do you think is the most interesting thing that has happened this year?"

Holliday looked up into the branches of the ginckgo tree. "I don't know," she answered thoughtfully. "You don't mean the most exciting? That, of course, was when you kept the bonds from being stolen. For myself, I believe, Susan, I should say the night of the Comus parade, when I got my fan and chain."

Susan was surprised. Holliday had not mentioned this incident for a long time.

"I know now it was Mr. Fortesque, as you guessed, Susan. Aunt Clara said so in one of her letters to Aunt Nan. Corinne found

out. She said, 'Don't tell Holliday, it might put notions in her head.' Aunt Nan forgot, I suppose. But anyway that is silly. What do you think she meant by notions? I hope I am not a silly goose like Clarice. But I do think it was an interesting experience, and I hope I shall see him some day,—perhaps while I am abroad."

Susan invariably felt lonesome when Holliday referred to abroad. "I'll never say again that nothing can happen," she remarked, "but with you away, and nearly all the boys too, I don't see how life can help being quiet."

Vacation, with its long summer days, had seemed to promise abundance of time for everything. It reached away into the dim future which it was easy to ignore. And now behold! it was more than half gone already.

It had been decided that Holliday was to go to France in September with her aunt. "To some dreadful school where I shan't know anybody, where I shall never hear my native tongue," she declared tragically.

To postpone the parting from his daughter as long as possible, Mr. Heywood was keeping Christmas Tree House till the last of Au-

gust. With its high ceilings, wide halls, and spacious garden, it was comfortable even in hot weather.

The Seymour house, too, was open. Mrs. Seymour dreaded a journey. Marion, she said, could go to Newport with her sister, and she and Dick would stay at home in peace; and so it was arranged. Mrs. Boone said home was the place for her in the summer time. Give her her own bath tub and her carriage. Perhaps in August she might take Lily and Charlie to the White Mountains. She wanted to make up to Charlie for his disappointment in the spring. The Maxwells had no thought of going, and the Manns usually stayed at home; so the circle remained unbroken. It was all on Holliday's account, Charlie said, and certainly all her friends did their best to make it a memorable summer.

The time that was to have been given to the story went to picnics, excursions up the river, and merrymakings of many kinds. At the Seymours' there was a tennis court, and croquet at Susan's and Bessie's. Aline was at home from school, and Miss Arthur made



“‘I’LL NEVER SAY AGAIN THAT NOTHING CAN HAPPEN.’”

them welcome at her beautiful country place; and by no means least, Christmas Tree House had not lost its attractions. "We must go on creating a pleasant atmosphere till the last minute," Holliday said.

As everybody discovers, the happier the days are, the faster they fly. It was August before any one was really used to its being July. And now that the time for parting drew near, they began to make plans for meeting again.

"Let's agree to meet somewhere four or five years from now," Tom Mann suggested one evening on the Maxwells' porch, where they had assembled. "We may see each other in the meantime, but this will be a special occasion. We'll be through college then, and—"

"Mercy upon us, we'll be gentlemen and ladies!" Charlie exclaimed.

"Put the ladies first, sir," said Dick, sternly.

"Dear me, how far away it seems!" Holliday said. "But I like that idea, Tom. I'll tell you what, let's write something and put it in a box and bury it; then when we meet, we can unearth it."

"Write what?" asked Lily.

"You are always wanting to write something," said Bessie.

"Bury it where?" inquired Dick, laughing.

"Why, write what we mean to be or do, I suppose. I haven't thought it out yet. I'll tell you! You know that old oak with a hollow in it, in the garden,—Christmas Tree House garden? That's the place."

"You won't be living there," objected Bessie.

"Miss Margaret will, and she won't mind. Don't you think it will be fun? I'll invite you all to supper next Friday night. It will be moonlight. I'll have a box ready and we'll write our plans, or whatever you decide will be interesting, after supper, and we'll put it in the oak. We'll each sign our name. And I have thought of another thing. Each of you bring your spade. That is enough for now. You'll all come?"

"Hurrah for one more party at Christmas Tree House!" cried Charlie, and the rest echoed the sentiment.

"May I come by for you?" Dick asked of Susan.

On the appointed evening, after a merry supper, and when the table had been finally cleared, pen and ink and a large sheet of paper were put before Tom.

"You are to be the scribe, for it was your suggestion," Holliday explained. "Each one is to tell in turn what he or she would like to be, and you are to put it down."

"Not what you think you ought to want to be, but honest," said Tom. "Ladies first. We'll begin with our hostess."

"Well," said Holliday, laughing, "I want to be a great lady of some kind. I want people to admire me, and I want to do a great deal of good."

"A queen, for instance?" asked Charlie.

"No, not a queen, but a person of importance."

"Put her down a person of importance," said Dick.

"She is sure to be that," Tom remarked gallantly. "Susan, you are next."

Susan hesitated. "I'd like to write stories," she owned.

"And live in some nice corner," added Holliday.

"A writer," wrote Tom after Susan's name.
"Now, Bessie."

"I want to be a doctor," Bessie announced.

"Why, Tom's going to be one!" several voices exclaimed.

"I don't care," said Bessie. "That doesn't make any difference."

"But, Bess—" Tom began.

"Hold on," said Dick, "this is what we want, and Bessie has a right to want it." So Tom reluctantly wrote his chosen profession after his sister's name.

Aline, it seemed, had gone back to art, and Nettie wished to be a great pianist.

"Now, Lily," said Tom.

"I think I'd like to marry a judge," Lily answered, and brought down the house.

"This is the first time matrimony has been mentioned," exclaimed Dick.

"Have you got your eye on him, Lil?" asked Charlie.

"You needn't laugh. There are always plenty of judges," said Lily, bridleing.

When Phil announced that he was going to be a lawyer, Holliday asked mischievously if he couldn't make it judge. Charlie wanted to

be a civil engineer. Dick intended to be a business man, because his father had his heart set upon his only son succeeding him as the head of the great hardware establishment. "But if it were not for disappointing Father I'd like to be a farmer," he said.

"You don't appreciate your luck," said Phil.

"And now," went on Holliday, "write that we promise to be comrades, to stand by each other, to remember the Wise Man, and to meet again four years from now, as near this date as possible. And in testimony of our determination to keep our promise, we will all of us place here our little spades to be reclaimed whenever the box is opened, if we have been true diggers, and herewith sign our names."

While Tom wrote obediently, at her dictation, Holliday produced a tin box, and into it went the document, after it had been duly signed, together with the twelve little spades. The box was then sealed, wrapped in oil-cloth, and tied securely, all under Holliday's direction; and then they adjourned to the garden.

By this time the moon was up, and by its

light, assisted by a few matches, they consigned the box to its resting-place in the hollow oak.

“We buried it darkly, at dead of night,”

murmured Charlie, but although they laughed they all felt rather serious, as they returned to the house. It was only a joke, but it emphasized the breaking up of their happy little circle.

“I have something to show you,” Dick said, when he and Susan were walking home; and stopping beneath a street light he took from his pocket a small piece of cardboard. It was red, and Susan recognized a moment later the little shoe that had made her Dick’s partner at Lily’s party so long ago.

“I found it to-day in a book,” he said. “I suppose you haven’t kept yours?”

“Yes, I have,” Susan owned shily.

“Good,” said Dick, “then we are still partners, aren’t we?”

“Susan, is that you?” called her mother from the porch. “Here is somebody who wants to see you.”

“Yes, Mother,” she answered, and with a

good-night to Dick, started up the walk. The somebody met her halfway.

"Well, Susan Hermione!" cried a familiar voice, "but I'm glad to see you!"

"Joe! Joe! Is it really you?"

It really was, at once the same old Joe and a much changed Joe, as was evident when the united family assembled in the lamp-lighted dining-room. He was thinner and browner, but more manly. The blue eyes had a steadier light in them, but the twinkle remained; there was the same hearty, friendly manner, but back of it a new poise, born of the self-respect that comes from successful battling with difficulties.

How glad everybody was to see him, and how interested he was in everybody he had ever known! How proud Father was of him, and how much Mother Kitty enjoyed his teasing!

As for Susan, she found it not quite so hard to part from Holliday, with Joe at hand to declare that next summer he and she would run over to France and pay her a visit, even though she knew it was just talk.

"Stranger things than that have happened, Susan Hermione. Deny it if you can," he told her.

This was of course indisputable. Susan in the swinging seat on the porch was watching the sunset clouds one afternoon and thinking of it. Who could tell? And after all, the uncertainty, when you looked at it in one way, made life the more interesting. Just then, where the rose tints of the evening sky melted into the violet, the first star shone out.

“Star light, star bright,”

Susan began. Then, gazing at those far-away twinkling points of light, she lost herself in memories of Elsie, in thoughts of Holliday and Dick, in dreams of what might happen, so that before she reached the end of her rhyme, there was another star!

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